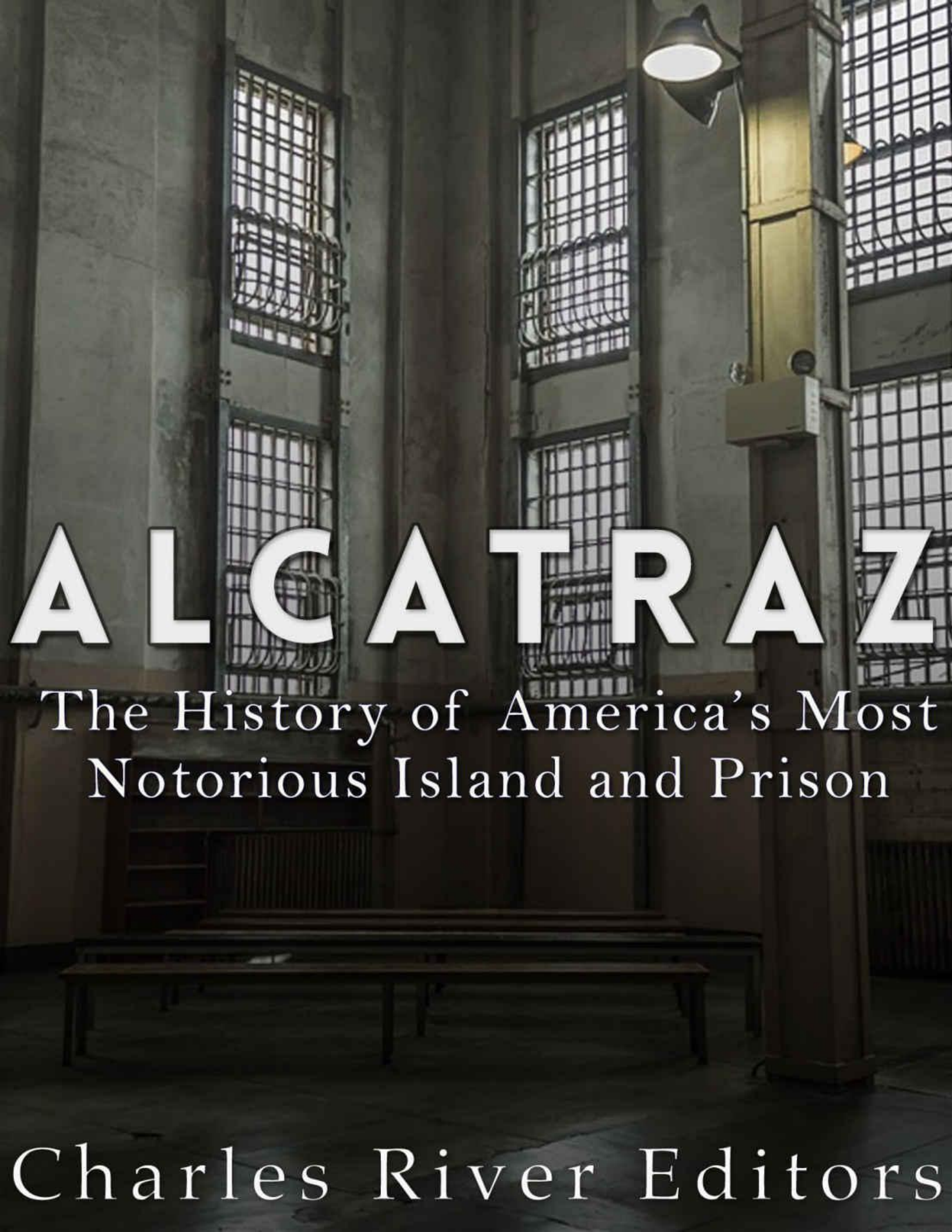


The background of the cover is a photograph of the interior of Alcatraz prison. It shows a long, empty corridor with high, barred windows. The walls are made of concrete and show signs of age. In the foreground, there are several long wooden benches. A single light fixture is visible on the right side of the frame.

ALCATRAZ

The History of America's Most
Notorious Island and Prison

Charles River Editors

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Alcatraz: The History of America's Most Notorious Island and Prison

By Charles River Editors



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Introduction



D. Ramey Logan's picture of Alcatraz

Alcatraz

“You were a number, you weren’t a name; I wasn’t Jim Quillen. Hell, I was Number 586 and nobody wanted that.” – Jim Quillen

“It’s mighty good to get up and leave. This Rock ain’t good for nobody.” - Frank Weatherman, the last prisoner to leave in 1963

Just a little over 2 kilometers offshore from the sparkling waters of the San Francisco Bay lies a humble strip of 22-acre land. Squawking pelicans, seagulls, and pigeons soar over the mysterious island, which is hugged by dense, salty fog. The island, of course, is none other than the infamous Alcatraz Island.

For centuries, Alcatraz continued to reel in interest from various parties, intrigued by the island's cold, barren grounds and its potential for isolation. Following the years of unrest that ensued from the Great Depression and the Prohibition Era, the government seized the opportunity to establish what would soon be known as one of the most notorious prisons in all of history.

Alcatraz Island has been home to a lighthouse, a military fort, a national park, and gatherings of Native American protesters, but say the name

Alcatraz to any American and they will immediately associate it with prison. With the likes of Al Capone, Robert “Birdman” Stroud, George “Machine Gun” Kelly, and James “Whitey” Bulger gracing the inmate roster, many quickly associated toughness with the prison. Not before long, legendary stories began surfacing from the island penitentiary, both true and fiction.

The island was a federal prison for only three decades, but in that time, “The Rock” became notorious for being the most secure prison in the nation. In that time, 3 dozen prisoners tried to escape, which led to the “Battle of Alcatraz” and some of the most complex plots ever made to bust out, but nobody ever successfully escaped The Rock, and several died trying. As one commenter poignantly put it, “You break the rules, you go to prison. You break the prison rules, you go to Alcatraz Prison.” Another writer echoed this sentiment, calling Alcatraz “the great garbage can of San Francisco Bay, into which every federal prison dumped its most rotten apples.”

In a sense, it was fitting that Alcatraz became the most famous prison in American history, because hundreds of years before the penitentiary was located there, it was being used by Native Americans to banish members. Thanks to the strong currents near it and the cold, inhospitable terrain of the small island, Native Americans only used it sparingly, and unruly members were often sent there as punishment.

While local Native Americans referred to it as “Evil Island,” the island got its most famous name from Spanish explorer Juan Manuel de Ayala, who mapped the Bay in 1775 and named the island “La Isla de los Alcatraces” (“The Island of the Pelicans”). Although pelicans no longer call the island home, a French explorer in the early 19th century confirmed that the island was “covered with a countless number of these birds. A gun fired over the feathered legions caused them to fly up in a great cloud and with a noise like a hurricane.”

Like the Native Americans, the Spanish barely used the island, but given its location, the island would eventually have military value. The federal government eventually established a fort on the island, and it was soon used to hold Confederate prisoners during the Civil War. During the war, one Union supporter gloated over the news that one Confederate sympathizer “will be transported to the healthful but breezy atmosphere of Alcatraz

Island, where he can ruminate ad nauseum and chew the bitter end of treason.”

For all of these reasons, Alcatraz has a unique legacy and it remains a fixture of American pop culture. Indeed, it remains one of San Francisco’s most popular tourist destinations. As a former captain of the guards, Philip Bergen, put it, “The public never wanted to know that real Alcatraz. Even today after the prison has been closed for so many decades, the public just won’t let go of the myths.”

Alcatraz: The History of America’s Most Notorious Island and Prison examines the colorful and controversial past of Alcatraz. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Rock like never before.

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Chapter 1: Early History

The 22-acre stretch of rocky land surrounded by the turbulent waters of the San Francisco Bay is one brimming with a rich tapestry of history and controversy. The earliest records of civilization in the island go as far back as 4,000 B.C.E. Even then, it appeared that seclusion would be a common theme passed down to the groups that flocked in and out of the coveted island.

The Muwekma Ohlone, a Native American tribe hailing from the California Coast, was said to have been the first to use the island as a mode of isolation. Due to the superstitions surrounding the island's evil spirits, it was where those who violated tribe rules were banished. It was also believed that the island doubled as a burial ground. Eventually, some of the Ohlone tribe would settle here, relying on bird eggs and seafood as food sources. The tribe also developed "ranked chiefdom," which were essentially complex societies within the people, and practiced their own form of religion.

Aside from the Ohlone, before European or American settlers ever made their way to the West Coast of North America, Alcatraz Island was a place few people wanted to spend any real time on. Rocky and cold, it was used by Native Americans as a source of food and the occasional camping expedition, but even centuries ago, it was often used as a place to send unruly tribal members who needed to be kept away from the rest of their society. According to Darryl Wilson of the Achoma 'Wi / Atsuge 'Wi tribe, "Grandfather said that long ago the Sacramento Valley was one freshwater lake. An angry spirit within the earth caused a great shaking which emptied the great lake and left only the San Francisco Bay in its wake. There, in isolation and containing a 'truth' was an island. According to our oral histories, that's where we were told to go and search for a healing treasure for our troubled people long ago. The island became known as 'the rock with the rainbow inside,' or 'diamond island.' It was said that the 'diamond' would heal and restore balance to all our people, everywhere. We were always told that the 'diamond' was a thought, or a truth. It was not jewelry. It sparkled and it shined, but it was not jewelry. It was much more."

Alcatraz, like most of the areas in the American West, remained relatively untouched by European influence until the mid-18th century. At that time, while 13 British colonies were about to break their ties and become independent, Spanish explorers were making their way along the West Coast. On Tuesday, October 31, 1769, Gaspar de Portolá finally made it to San Francisco Bay. He and his engineer, Miguel Costansó later recorded in the ship's log, "From the summit we descended a large bay lying to the northwest under a point of land reaching far out to sea, over which there had been much disputing the evening before whether it was an island or no, it having been impossible then, because of some horizon-mist covering it, to make it out as clearly as we did now. Out beyond, about to the west-northwest with respect to our position, and a bit to the southwest from the point, could be seen seven white farallones [sea cliffs] of differing sizes and looking back along the north side of the bay there were abrupt white bluffs made out more toward the north, while turning around toward the northeast, the mouth of the inlet was discovered that seemed to reach inland."



Gaspar de Portolá

On August 11, 1775, another explorer, Juan Manuel de Ayala, would give the island its name: "The boat was launched and I set out to search for better anchorage for the ship. I went out toward the island I named de los

Angeles [Angel Island], which is the largest in this harbor, in search of proper moorings for making water and wood; and though I found some good ones, I rather preferred to pass onward in search of another island, which when I reached it proved so arid and steep there was not even a boat-harbor there; I named this island La Isla de los Alcatraces [Island of the Pelicans] because of their being so plentiful there.”



Juan Manuel de Ayala

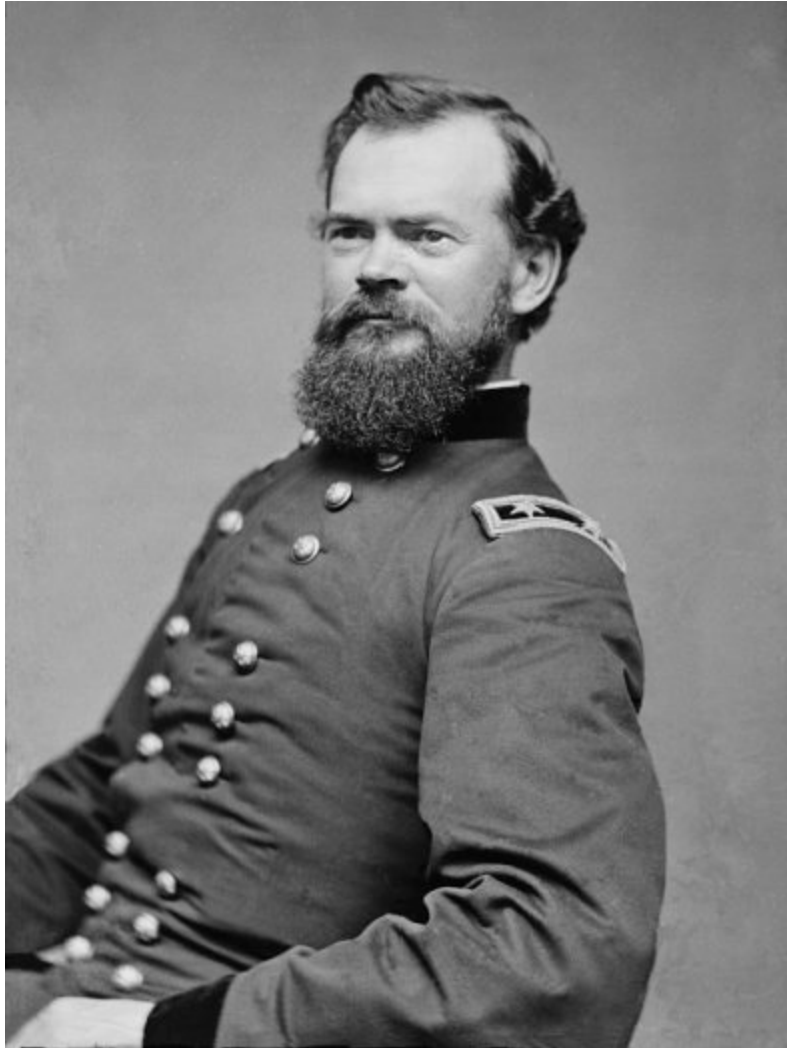
Later, when Spanish explorers brought missionaries to area to set up schools and churches, Native Americans who did not want to live within the California Mission System moved to the island to remain free to live as they pleased. This proved to be a good idea, because while the island was harsh, it was also largely ignored until the mid-1800s, when the United States government built a fort there.

In 1848, the Mexican-American War came to conclusion. California, along with Alcatraz Island, was ceded to the United States. A year after that came the California Gold Rush, which drove troves of miners from

around the world to the American River in the state. Authorities decided they needed to enforce extra security measures to prevent other countries from seizing or draining California of the prized metal. When U.S. authorities scouted out Alcatraz Island, they chronicled its isolated terrain instantly, and began work on plans for a military fortification.

Alcatraz was originally intended to be a coastal battery as well, and the first suggestion for such a fortress was made on November 1, 1850 by a joint commission of the Army and Navy. It said, “The first consideration in conjunction with defense would be to prevent the passage of hostile vessels through the channel of entrance.” This would be achieved by creating two lines of defense: The outer one at the Golden Gate to consist of a fortress at Fort Point of one hundred and fifteen guns and a battery of one hundred guns directly opposite on Lime Point; the inner to consist of a fortress at Alcatraz with batteries at Black Point [now Fort Mason], and Angel Island.”

Major John L. Smith was sent to survey the island for this purpose and later reported, “The island of Alcatrazes is a mass of rock with a very thin layer crust of soil and bird manure on the surface.” While work on the fort was being completed, it had to be staffed, and before long, serving on Alcatraz became one of the most dreaded duties in the American armed services. Second Lieutenant James Birdseye McPherson, who would go on to be one of the Union’s most famous generals during the Civil War, was one of the unlucky ones sent there. He recalled, “I often think of my position one year ago, and instinctively draw a comparison between it and my present one. Candor compels me to state that in everything appertaining to the social amenities of life, the “Pea Patch” [Fort Delaware] is preferable to Alcatraz — though I am determined to make the best of the matter, looking forward joyfully to the time when I can return to the Atlantic States.”



McPherson

In 1853, authorities started construction on the military stronghold, coining the new project “Fort Alcatraz.” The project began with the erection of a temporary wharf, barracks, offices, and shops. Sandstone rocks were blasted and used along with bricks to fortify the towering walls that bordered the island. These were mounted along with 11 long-range cannons and 4 36,000-lb Rodman guns. Ammunition from Rodman guns were enough to sink enormous ships and vessels from 3 miles away. All together, the weapons on the island could fire up to 6,949-lbs of lethal iron shower in one barrage. By the next year, the first operating light house in the West Coast was built.

The first reported deaths in the island occurred in 1857. During the excavation of a roadway between the wharf and the guardhouse, Mother Nature struck with a 7,000-cubic yard landslide. Dozens of laborers were injured and 2 men perished in the process.

By 1859, a citadel was built, which completed the line of defense. The three-story structure was only accessible by a drawbridge, which hovered over a dry moat. Along with 86 men of the Third U.S. Artillery, Captain Joseph Stewart took control of the island. Joseph K. Mansfield, sent by the army to inspect the facility, reported, "I this afternoon inspected the fortifications on Alcatrazes Island in this harbor, and have to report the result to the general chief as follows: This work has been under the superintendence of 2d Lieut. James B. McPherson of the Corps of Engineers since the 1st of January 1858 when he relieved Brevet Major Z. B. Tower of the Corps of Engineers who commenced this work. This work from the beginning has been extremely well conducted, and managed by most faithful and meritorious officers. The progress has been great under the difficulties to be encountered in a new country, at the time the work was commenced. At first it was difficult to obtain suitable building materials. New stone is had at various places. Excellent granite comes from Folsom on the American River, for both coping and walls. Granite for coping is had at Monterey. Blue calcareous hard stone is had in this harbor from Angel Island. Brick is in the greatest abundance, and excellent quality from Sacramento. Lime from Diablo via San Joaquin River. Water from Sausalito on the Main, and cement from New York, and all at constructively reasonable rates."

Soon, the garrison began utilizing Alcatraz Island as a place to harbor prisoners. In 1861, the Union Army based in California officially declared Alcatraz a military prison. The crew built even more prisons around the area for separate inmates, referred to as the "Lower Prison." At this time, the U.S. army also commonly deployed the Native Americans that inhabited the island as scouts. Unsurprisingly, like many prisons of the 19th century, conditions were deplorable. Men were stacked side by side and forced to sleep on the ice-cold, hard floors. No heating system, running water, or other sanitation standards were met, which led to the breakout of debilitating diseases that swept the prison.



Late 19th century picture of Alcatraz

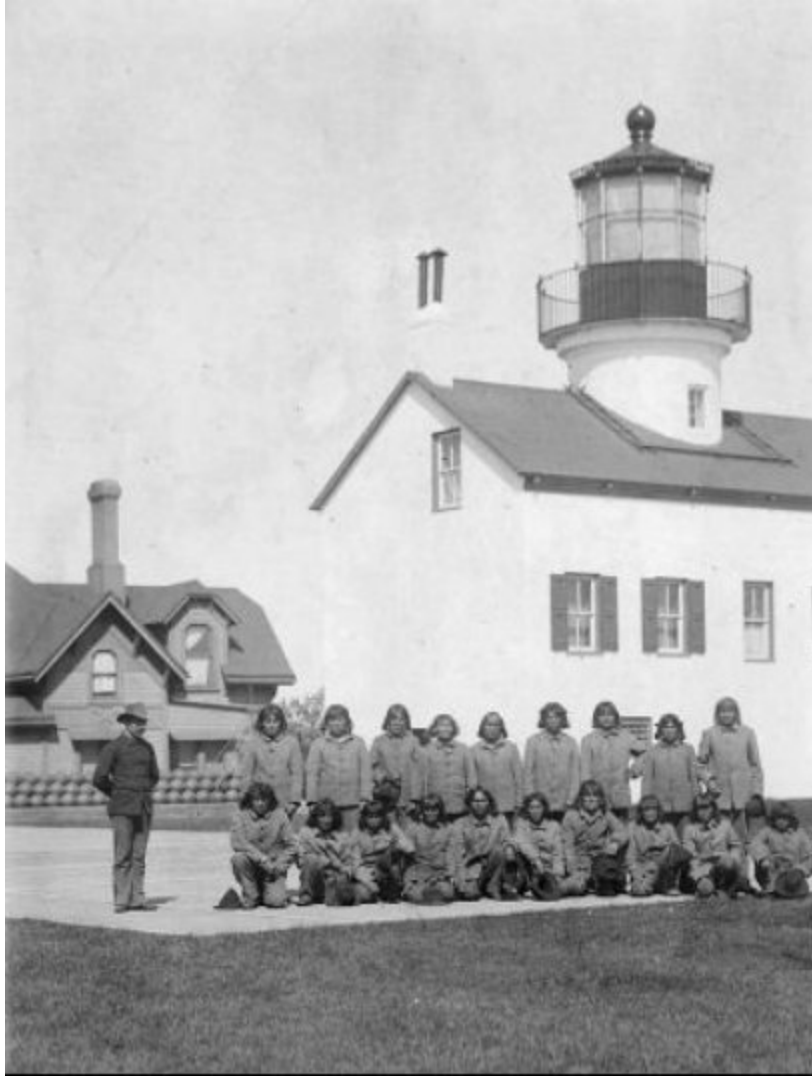


A model of the layout of the fort

Chapter 2: A New Look



Late 19th century picture of the lighthouse and citadel building on Alcatraz



Inmates being held on Alcatraz

“Prison's not a nice place to be. Those people are not in there for singing in the choir.” – Larry Todd, Texas Department of Criminal Justice

With the United States reportedly housing nearly 25 percent of the world's prison population, the nation is no stranger to contention from the public. The history of the United States criminal justice system dates back to the inception of the country itself. In the 1600s, jails were used as a temporary means of detaining criminals until trials or punishments set by the court could be met. Debtors and political prisoners, on the other hand, were those that did lengthy stints behind bars. Those days, punishments for offenses ranging from religious to criminal were carried out on the streets, often with the public's participation. Rotten food and jeers were

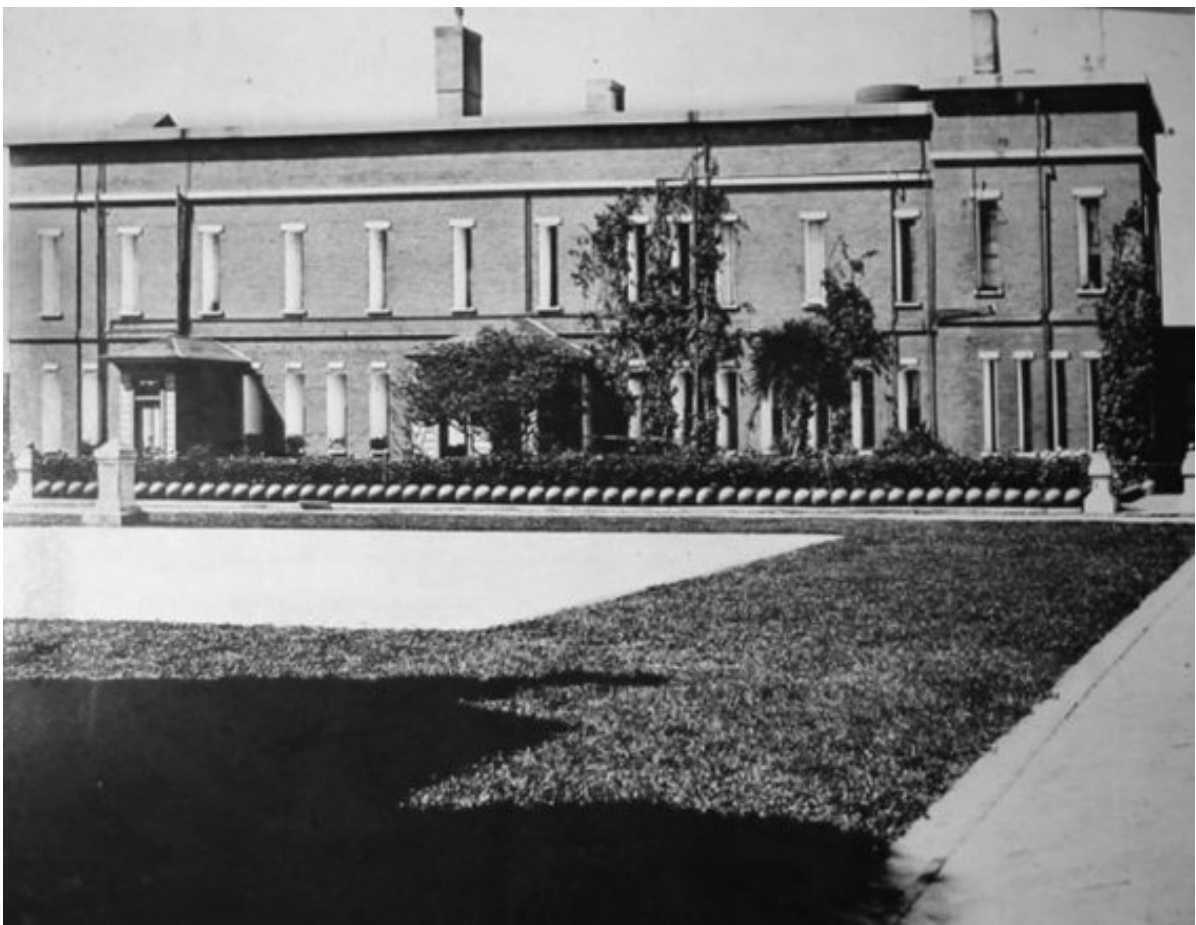
hurled at criminals as they walked to their floggings, exiles, or executions. Even when Colonial-era Boston was just a modest town of 40 homes, some of the very first construction projects of the settlers were prisons and jailhouses.

The immigration boom that followed the Revolutionary War and the early 19th century saw an undeniable surge in both population and crime rate. As a result, progress in the prison system was frustrated by overcrowding, pitiful sanitary standards, and corruption. Authorities tested the waters of reform by differentiating prisons from penitentiaries. In 1821, Auburn Prison developed a system of strenuous inmate labor and corporal punishment. Eastern State Penitentiary, the largest and most expensive detainment facility in 1829, built individual cells for each of the inmates, complete with sleeping, bathing, and exercising accommodations. During this time, prisons for women and juveniles were also multiplying.

In many ways, Alcatraz seemed almost destined by history to be a prison, as it had not been in use as a fort for any time at all before the Army began sending prisoners there. Perhaps it was the bleak surroundings that were seen as punishing or the ease with which the island could be guarded, but whatever it was, the number of prisoners on the island soon became a source of concern and aggravation for the other soldiers stationed there. On September 10, 1862, Captain William A. Winder complained that the “caponiere at the entrance of the fortification, defending approach from the wharf, is occupied by the guard and prisoners; the latter being so numerous they entirely fill the casemate on the right of the entrance, rendering it necessary that the guard should occupy the one on the left. For this reason the howitzers intended for the defense have never been mounted, nor can they until some other arrangement is made for the care of the prisoners.”

Eventually, it made sense to use the lion's share of the facility to house prisoners, and in 1870, a report was filed with the Assistant Surgeon General of the United States that detailed the way in which prisoners were cared for on the island. It read in part, “The buildings consist of a citadel, two brick barrack buildings for troops, and three prison buildings on the summit of the island, and the laundresses' quarters, blacksmith and

carpenter's workshop, two boathouses, coal and wood house, and bowling alley and theater for the men, most of which are situated on the eastern face of the cliff. The citadel, of brick, is 200 by 100 feet, and is two stories high above the basement, with bastion fronts facing the northwest and southeast. It is well ventilated by the main hall passages and windows. It is used as officers' quarters, hospital, and quartermaster and subsistence offices and storerooms. The set [of rooms] for each officer consists of two large and comfortable rooms, with kitchen and dining room attached, and water-closets and bathrooms. The rooms set apart for hospital use comprise a dispensary and two wards, a kitchen, and an adjoining mess room, a storeroom, bathroom, and a water-closet. The wards are each 35 by 26 by 17 feet, well floored and ceiled, and are furnished each with ten beds and bedside tables, chairs, dumbwaiter, closet, and a washstand. They are warmed by coal grates, lighted and ventilated by side windows. Air space per bed, 1,547 cubic feet; area, 91 feet.... The prison rooms are three buildings, ventilated by skylights and warmed by stoves in the main hall. They are arranged in two tiers (in one, three), with galleries for the upper tiers. Ventilators are placed over the door of each cell, and air tubes in the walls. One building contains fourteen single and two double cells; the second has forty-five cells, and the third forty-eight single and four double cells. The average size is 8 ½ by 6 by 3 ½ feet, giving an airspace to each of 161 cubic feet. Adjoining these buildings are the kitchens and mess-rooms for the troops and prisoners, and the bakery for the post."



Pictures of the citadel

While grim and harsh by modern standards, Alcatraz was originally built to modern prison specifications and in 1870 was considered an altogether appropriate place to punish and possibly even rehabilitate law breakers. However, just as it often the situation in modern penal institutions, overcrowding eventually became a problem, and new, much less comfortable wooden building were added to the compound, some of which were said to be little better than horse stalls. In the early 20th century, a medical report warned, "Sanitary defects of the prison are especially apparent. The ventilation of the buildings is very faulty. The corridors, kitchen, and mess rooms are disagreeably drafty.... The prisoner when locked up for the night is virtually boxed in for so many hours.... The means available for solitary confinement are such as have long been discarded in the better class of civilian penal establishments."

Long before it became a named whispered in horror by civilian criminals, Alcatraz developed a reputation for being the harshest military prison in America, and it was also one of the most strictly organized and run, as this excerpt from the 1914 regulation book demonstrates:

"Classification of Prisoners:

General Prisoners will be received in first class with exceptions made by the Commandant only. Third-class men will be promoted to second-class and second-class men to first class after two and one half months excellent conduct respectively. Promotions, paroles, and reductions will be made by the Commandant only. Promotion Order will be issued on the 15th of each month. Any first-class prisoner may be paroled (under 943 A.R.) after serving half of his sentence.... Class will be designated by a cloth badge 2½ inches by ½ inch, white, red, and yellow for first, second, and third class respectively, on a brown cloth patch 3½ by 1 ½ inches, which will be sewed on a sleeve of right arm above cuff. Paroled prisoners will be designated by a white triangular cloth badge 1½ inches to a side which will be sewed on the sleeve directly above the class badge. The quarters, mess tables, and benches in the Assembly Room of disciples will be separated from

those of other general prisoners by an aisle. There will be no correspondence between such prisoners. Similarly the Quarters and Mess tables of enlisted prisoners will be separated from all general prisoners by an aisle.

Privileges:

Third-class prisoners will enjoy the letter and tobacco privilege only. Segregated prisoners and 2nd class prisoners will enjoy letter and tobacco privileges in addition to the library privilege once a week and entertainment privilege once a week, by detachment, as segregated. The second-class men making a separate detachment. First-class prisoners will in addition enjoy the privilege of closed but unlocked door to individual quarters, between Reveille and Tattoo.... The disciples will in addition have the privilege of open doors from Reveille to Tattoo, talking in quarters and visiting in day room.”

On June 5, 1873, Paiute Tom became the first Native American man sent to Alcatraz by the US government. Unfortunately, he was shot and killed by a guard only two days after his arrival. No records to the motives of Tom's killing have survived. That same year, 2 Modoc Indians named Barncho and Sloluck were arrested for the murders of peace commissioners in the Modoc Wars. Along with 4 other members of the tribe, the 2 were initially sentenced to hang. However, President Ulysses S. Grant took pity on the pair's youth, and sent them to Alcatraz instead. Whereas Barncho died of tuberculosis on the island, Sloluck was eventually released.

Native Americans accused of mutiny would continue to be shipped to the island. One of these notable cases came with Kaetena, a Chiricahua Apache chief, who was captured during battle against General George Crook's army. After 2 years on the island, Crook himself reported that Chief Kaetena had “a complete reformation of character.”

1895 saw the largest intake of Native American prisoners yet, with 19 Hopi leaders marched off the boats and onto the island. Their crimes

involved land disputes with the government, as well as rebelling against the mandatory educational programs Native American children were made to attend. It was only when the Hopi leaders agreed to stop interfering with US government plans that they saw freedom again.

The United States found themselves entangled in yet another conflict in 1898 when they interfered with the Cuban War of Independence. This resulted in the Spanish-American War. Even more prisoners were harvested from the war, which skyrocketed the scant population of 26 to over 450.

The Upper and Lower Prisons of Alcatraz were bustling with the sudden influx of prisoners. Thousands of troops passed San Francisco en route and returning from the Philippines. Multitudes of soldiers unknowingly brought back severely contagious tropical diseases, swarming the beds of both the Alcatraz hospital and other San Francisco facilities to full capacity. Many succumbed to their illnesses. On an interesting side note, records surfaced about 4 prisoners embarking on a wooden butter vat with stolen paddles, taking to sea. Their attempt at fleeing was swiftly foiled when the surging currents swept them right back to the Alcatraz shore.

Authorities soon discovered that the Upper and Lower Prisons were fire hazards. Their suspicions were realized when a fire that broke out from a knocked over oil lantern nearly wiped out the entire Lower Prison. Prison laborers were soon put to work in replacing the wooden barracks with concrete, with the new construction completed by 1912.

The public began to get riled up by the forbidding military prison, an ominous contrast from the picturesque scene of the San Francisco Bay waters. Heeding the public's outcry, more support buildings were slapped onto the Upper Prison over the following years. The Lower Prison was converted to workshops. The US Army shipped over tons of fresh soil from the neighboring Angel Island, which they sprinkled across the scratchy-dry terrain of Alcatraz Island. Some prisoners were sent to the workshops, and others trained as gardeners and put to work on the new fields. Vibrant flowers and greenery brightened the landscape over time, which eventually appeased the public.

Over time, conditions in the prisons improved, and the severity of punishments laxed slightly. By the 1920s, prisoners were permitted their very own baseball field, complete with uniforms. The US Army hosted weekly “Alcatraz Fights” on Friday nights, pitting boxers handpicked by the Disciplinary Barracks against each other. These fights were so popular, they drew in visitors from the mainland lucky enough to score the rare tickets.

By the late 1920s, everyone in the Army knew that Alcatraz was the place to avoid, and this was even truer after Major W.R. Stewart was assigned there. In 1930, he made a presentation entitled “Definition and Operation,” in which he wrote, “The mission of the United States Disciplinary Barracks is two-fold. First, rehabilitative, and second, punitive. Punishment by confinement at hard labor is not the paramount aim of such institutions. The reclamation of the convicted soldier for the Army and society is of equal importance.... The Pacific Branch of the United States Disciplinary Barracks is located on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. Here, on this little island, some 600 soldiers are expiating their crimes. Their sentences range from six months to life imprisonment. Approximately 10 percent of them are serving sentences of ten years or more. Over one-third have been sentenced for military offenses, the remainder for misdemeanors and felonies. The prisoners at this institution are subjected to a firm, impartial discipline. Misconduct and misbehavior result in punishment, good conduct is rewarded. The punishments are not cruel but consist of forfeiture of good conduct time, loss of privileges, and solitary confinement for a limited period. The punishment is made to fit the offense and for minor infractions of rules, may be only a reprimand or the loss of one or more entertainments. Every infraction is recorded for each prisoner and this record is considered in making work assignments and in taking action on requests for parole, clemency, or restoration.”

Hoping to defend his position against accusations of undue harshness, Stewart emphasized the rewards he gave the men over the punishments he inflicted: “All men in good standing — over 90% of the inmates of the institution — are granted all of the privileges allowed by law. Such men are permitted to attend all entertainments, including motion pictures, boxing bouts and shows provided by theatrical organizations of San

Francisco and vicinity. They are permitted to write at least two letters weekly, with writing materials and stamps furnished by the government. They are issued tobacco with liberal smoking privileges. A well-stocked library is open to them. When not at work in the daytime, they are allowed the freedom of the jail yard for exercise and games. Once a week all men in good standing are permitted to have visitors. Misconduct results in the loss of all privileges for stated periods, in the most refractory cases. The spiritual welfare of the inmates of this institution is the charge of an Army chaplain detailed for this purpose. He holds regular services, teaches Bible classes and is the friend and advisor of all. It is also his duty to provide materials for sports and to provide and supervise entertainment...”

Next, Stewart went on to defend the men’s surroundings and their housing: “The living conditions at Alcatraz are not uncomfortable, to say the least. The prison proper is considered to be a model in cleanliness, orderliness, and sanitation. The entire 600 prisoners are housed in one great cell room, well lighted and ventilated. Each man has his own private cell, completely equipped. Every necessity is furnished to him. He wears a neat black uniform. His food is that of a soldier of the United States Army, the best fed of all the armies. The prisoner’s laundry and dry cleaning are done for him. A sanitary barbershop and baths are open to him daily. And, finally, a well-stocked storeroom is at his service from which he draws, as needed, everything from a toothbrush to a uniform. Every opportunity possible is afforded the ambitious man for study. Illiterates must attend school daily. For others there is a night school. Many are taking correspondence courses or devoting their evenings to self-study. The prison library has a large and varied selection of technical works. Study is encouraged to the fullest extent possible.”

As for those who wondered what the prisoners did all day, Stewart offered the following answer: “The hours of labor, except for such men as cooks and bakers, are from 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM, with one hour for the noonday meal and Saturday afternoon and Sunday off. The prisoners rise at 6 AM and go to bed at 9 PM. Their work varies. Many are engaged in rock quarrying, road building, construction, and farming. A large number work in the prison itself as clerks, cooks, and janitors. In conformity with the mission of the institution to prepare prisoners for their return to

civilian life by teaching them trades, a number of industries are operated for this purpose. A few of these trades are furniture making, tailoring, book making, and printing. In all, there are fifty trades open to the ambitious prisoner.”

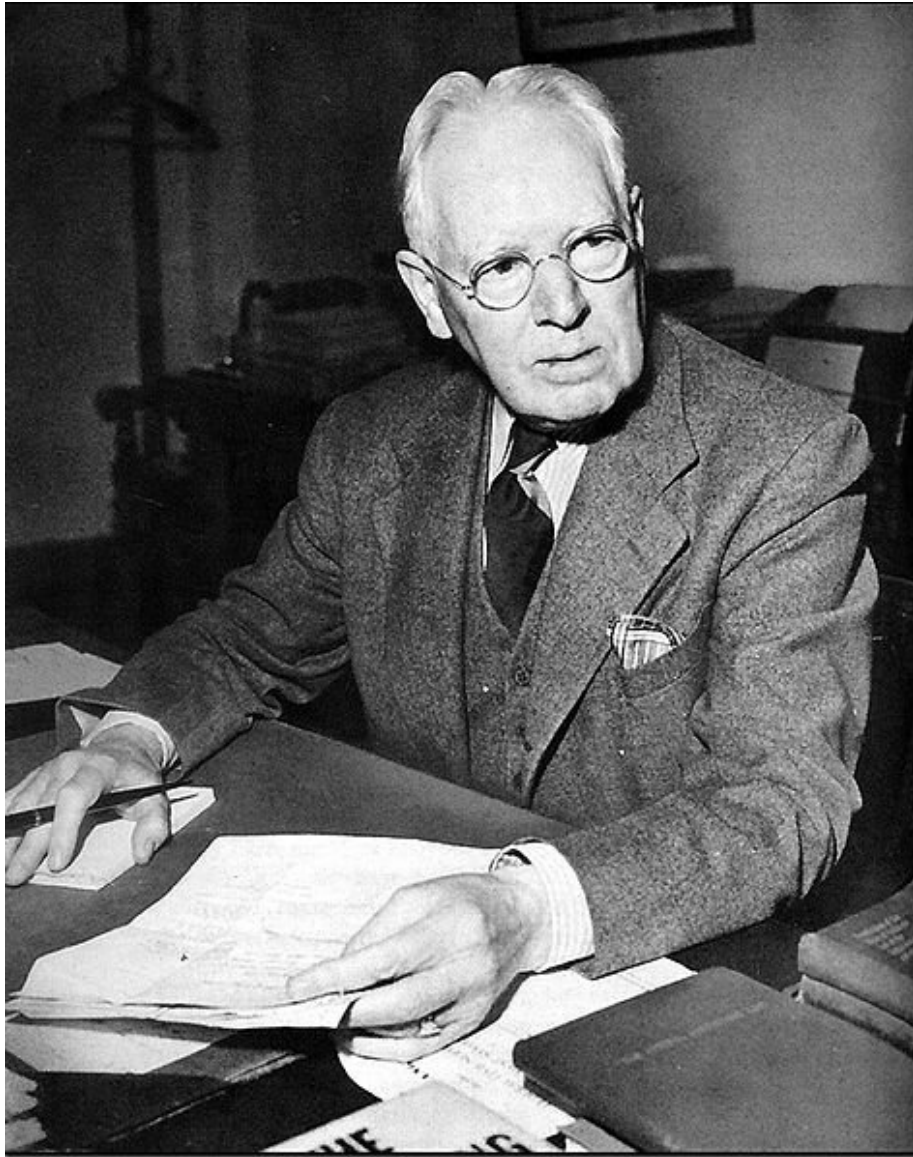
Finally, thinking that he might have gone too far in the other direction, Stewart returned to his mantra about punishment and rehabilitation, concluding, “Lest the picture of the prisoner’s life seem too roseate, let us turn to the other side of the picture. The prisoner, for long, weary months, is under a strict, never-ceasing discipline, under which every lapse brings some punishment. He is cut off from all communication with his relatives and friends, except that for one hour weekly his relatives may visit him. Day after day, night after night alluring freedom spreads itself before his eyes across the narrow bay. Narrow it may be, but a gulf to the prisoners, as some of them have discovered, to their cost, in trying to escape by swimming. The city is so close that its sounds and sights are a constant reminder of the freedom that has been lost.”

However, the upkeep of the increasingly costly military prison would soon meet its demise. When authorities found themselves drowning in operational costs, the U.S. Army decided to shut down the prison. On October 12, 1933, the barracks were officially handed over to the United States Department of Justice.

Chapter 3: The Ultimate Prison



Picture of the entrance to the federal prison



James A. Johnston

“You are entitled to food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention. Anything else that you get is a privilege.” – Regulation #5 in booklet issued to Alcatraz inmates

“I assumed office on January 2, 1934. Hour after hour, day after day, I walked back and forth, up and down and around the island, from the dock to the administration building, from the office to the powerhouse, powerhouse to the shops, shops to the barracks, into the basements, up on the roofs, across the yards, through the tunnels: I sent more suggestions to

Washington...” - James A. Johnston, the first warden of the U.S. Penitentiary on Alcatraz Island

When the Great Depression reared its head in the stock market crash of October 1929, the United States found itself smote by the worst economic disaster Americans had ever faced. The horrid era saw a time of drastic poverty, unjustly concentrated wealth, and widely unpopular government regulations. The public was still seething from the ban on alcohol enforced 9 years prior (otherwise known as the Prohibition Years), but what hit next would propel the nation's atmosphere to one of rage, despair, and chaos.

The top 1% of the population lavished themselves with approximately a third of the entire nation's wealth. Other than that, those in the middle class were flung into poverty for the very first time, with joblessness and destitution on a frightening rise. The average income of an American family plunged 40% in a matter of 3 years. By 1932, around 13 to 15 million Americans were unemployed, which made up over 20% of the population. Suicide rates climbed to 17 per 100,000 people, as opposed to 13.

The nation descended into disaster. In New York City, 6,000 street vendors trolled the streets, all selling apples for 5 cents apiece. President Herbert Hoover was widely roasted by the public, naming homemade towns of cardboard houses “Hooverilles,” and bland, nutrition-less soups “Hoover Soups.” To put it into more perspective, money circulation was so abysmal, no nickels were minted from 1932 to 1933.

Many accused the U.S. government for their unsatisfactory handling of the economic crisis and the lackluster way they tended to the citizens, who were barely hanging on. Needless to say, riots, protests, and crowd violence were at an all-time high. Crime rates flew through the roof, increasing 1,000% since the 1900s.

The infamous gangster and organized crime era flourished in these years, with figures such as Al Capone bootlegging alcohol, firearms, and other banned contraband. Mobster life was both glamorized and feared by the public, who stood by as they observed them infiltrate businesses and government agencies, taking the reins through bribery and corruption. This was a time when public crime scenes and random bloodshed had become expected. When the Great Depression came to an end in 1933, another

widespread epidemic of armed bank robberies and burglaries pervaded the country. Interestingly enough, many put the thieves on a different pedestal, and instead, referred to them as “modern day Robin Hoods.”

It was not long before the public rallied for the government to clean up the streets and to whisk the seemingly untouchable mobsters off their thrones. The public no longer felt safe with the increasing number of public murders and shootouts, accusing law enforcement of cowering and hiding from mobsters that trumped them in arms and defense. Coupled with the abundance of regular breakouts from scrappy prisoners in local jails, the government was in dire need of a unique facility alienated enough from the general population to store these dangerous, restless convicts.

Attorney General Homer Cummings and Sanford Bates, the head of the Federal Prisons, decided to take the new project under their wing. They zoned in on Alcatraz Island, deciding it was an optimal site for the new penitentiary. Not only could they house the worst of public enemies, it would act as a perfect deterrent to those currently living or aspiring to the life of crime. Robert Burge, a security expert, was plucked out from the very best in the country, and tasked with the design and beefing up the security system of the new escape-proof prison.

When January of 1934 rolled along, the renovations at Alcatraz Island commenced. The flat, brittle bars of the cells were substituted with hardened steel. The fortified metal used was allegedly tool-resistant, as it could survive a hacksaw. What was more, the new cell bars cost roughly \$200,000, more than it took to build the entire prison. Hardened steel also replaced every single bar on windows accessible by inmates. All utility tunnels were sealed up to ward off prisoners from hiding or escaping through these passages. Fully-equipped, secure gun galleries were built within the cell perimeters, allowing guards easy access to arms while patrolling the grounds. The galleries were situated on levels beyond the prisoners' reach, which acted as a control center for all keys and equipment, as well as a birds-eye view over the prison cells underneath. Among the equipment in the galleries were controls to set off teargas canisters in the Dining Hall, in event of riots.

Guard towers were established all over the island, providing extra security measures over the island for potential escapees. Electromagnetic metal detectors were stationed outside the Dining Hall and workshop access paths.

New cells were added, coming to a total of approximately 600 usable cells, all routed with electricity. These cells were deemed inescapable by authorities. If an inmate were to triumphantly tunnel his way through the cell wall, he would need to navigate his way through the complex maze of the cell house. In spite of the institution's ability to house almost 600 prisoners, authorities decided that prisoners would only take up Blocks B, C, and D, and that capacity would not exceed 300 at a time.

In the summer of 1934, the federal government assigned the first group of civilian inmates to “The Rock,” and it could not have come at a more opportune time for generating headlines. Americans and the press were fascinated by these men and their crimes, and it was the heyday of the gangster era and America’s love-hate relationship with outlaws and mobsters.

Among the first prisoners to arrive was the infamous Al Capone, one of the country’s most famous mobsters, as a result of his reign over Prohibition Era Chicago. After numerous charges of theft and murder failed to stick, he was finally convicted on tax evasion charges in 1932. Capone was sent to federal prison in Atlanta, but while he was there, his health went into a long and steady decline, even as he engaged in ongoing legal maneuvers to attain an early release. Resentment over his special treatment in the Cook County Jail led to similar charges in Atlanta, not to mention the fact that he was widely suspected of continuing to carry out his criminal enterprises from jail. Thus, in August 1934, Capone was transferred to the recently opened federal facility on Alcatraz. Shortly after he arrived, his syphilis began taking a toll on his mental and physical health, and as Alcatraz stripped him of his old status and prestige, Capone became a target of other prisoners. In 1936, he was the target of a brutal stabbing attack, and two years later, he suffered a serious mental breakdown and spent months in the prison hospital.



Capone's mugshot at Alcatraz





Pictures of Capone's cell in Alcatraz

Also among that first group of inmates was gangster George “Machine Gun” Kelly, who actually proved to be a model prisoner. In fact, he was so docile that his fellow inmates nicknamed him “Pop Gun” Kelly. Arthur “Doc” Barker, Ma Barker’s only surviving son, arrived at Alcatraz during those first few weeks, and as the men were being taken across the Bay, rumors flew that the waters were infested with sharks.



Machine Gun Kelly



Doc Barker

Still, any reporter hoping to find out anything about the new inmates was sadly disappointed, because their personal information was kept carefully

secret. They arrived quietly by train in Oakland, and from there they were taken on a small ship, *General McDowell*, to the island.

The next group of prisoners (among them Capone) arrived from Atlanta a few days later, and another 106 men got there on September 4, 1934. According to one reporter who managed to get some information about the trip, the train bringing the prisoners made an oddly circuitous route to the Bay: “Two miles east of Martinez, a switchman shifted the train onto the Southern Pacific track that took it over the railroad bridge heading toward Suisun City. It turned left at Fairfield, passed through Cordelia and Napa Junction. At Shellville, the train went on the tracks of the Northwestern Pacific and turned south, passing Black Point, Ignacio, and San Rafael, finally stopping at Tiburon. Awaiting it there (Tiburon) was the Red Stack Sea Rover, under Captain Webster Hargins, with 25 special guards and federal operatives, ready to take the prisoners out to Alcatraz.”

Chances are that this route was designed to confuse the inmates and disorient them, thereby discouraging attempts to escape. Also, it could be used to kill time before a scheduled arrival without the risk of having the inmates sitting still in one place. After all, given that these were the hardest of criminals, guards figured that anytime the train stopped, the chance of escape went up significantly.



Golden Gate NRA, Park Archives, Carl Sandstrom Alcatraz Photograph Collection, c. 1939-1962, GGCA-3264

A picture of guards at Alcatraz

Upon arriving at Alcatraz, the men were typically greeted with sights typically found only in classic horror movies and nightmares. Alver Bloomquist, one of the corrections officers, remembered his view from one of the guard towers: “At night, it was freezing cold and if the fog was thick enough, it had a very eerie feeling. You couldn’t see anything when the night fog shrouded the island and I can still remember hearing the deafening screech of the seagulls that would startle the hell out of you. It always made you a little nervous, especially after knowing that those desperate inmates had rushed Stites [an officer assigned to the Model Shop tower during a 1938 escape attempt]. When they finally gave me a day assignment in the industries, I can remember never being happier. I used to think that this was worse than being locked in one of those cells.”

Determined to set a precedent for rigid conformity, Warden Johnston took a severe and merciless approach to the discipline of the prison population.

Guards were tasked with completing 13 headcounts per day. Over time, the guards grew so accustomed to their faces, they knew each inmate by name.

The dreary establishment was composed of 4 cell blocks. A Block was commonly used as conference rooms and storage space, and at times, to detain troubled inmates that needed to be kept away from the rest of the population. The 336 cells in B Block and C Block, which stood 3 levels tall, were designed to house the majority of the prisoners. And finally, along with the library, D Block facilitated 36 segregation cells and 6 for solitary confinement.

In an effort to feel closer to home, the prisoners assigned nicknames to the different facilities and the gleaming green paths of the concrete walkways. The corridor between Block A and Block B was known as “Michigan Avenue.” Between Blocks B and C, otherwise known as the central walkway, was called “Broadway.” The area sandwiched between the Dining Hall and cell blocks was affectionately known as “Times Square.” The walkway from Block C that led to the library was “Park Avenue.” As for D Block, also known as “The Hole,” its corridor was nicknamed the “Sunset Strip.” To the inmates, the cells lined along the bottom tier of Broadway were the worst. Not only were these cells draftier, they provided the least amount of privacy from guards and the rest of general population. New inmates were usually sent to Block B, where they were isolated and placed in mandatory quarantine for up to 3 months.

The steadfast routine introduced by Warden Johnston modeled the daily life of an Alcatraz inmate for the years to come. At 6:30 AM, the morning whistle reverberated throughout the prison, jolting the inmates awake. Inmates were expected to be washed up and dressed, their beds made, shelves wiped down, and floors swept clean by 6:50. After the first headcount, inmates filed into the Mess Hall. A quick 20 minutes were allotted to the inmates for breakfast. After the inmates cleaned up after themselves, they returned to single-file position, awaiting the assigning of work detail for the day. As the day progressed, tedious headcounts were continuously peppered in while the prisoners worked. The workday ended at 4:15. Prisoners were then marched back to the Mess Hall, and back to their cells. By 4:50, the locks of all cells were bolted shut. Lights-out came at 9:30PM. While the

inmates slumbered, guards would make 3 more headcounts at 12:01, 3, and 5 AM.



Golden Gate NRA, Park Archives, Arnold W. Peters Alcatraz Papers, GOGA 33266.001

A picture of a band playing in the dining room



Golden Gate NRA, Park Archives, Carl Sundstrom Alcatraz Photograph Collection, c. 1939-1962, GCGA-3264

Picture of inmates in the dining hall

Inmates were expected to pull their weight, taking up a variety of jobs provided by the prison program. Some inmates were tasked to work in the cell house with jobs such as cooking and tidying up. Others were responsible for maintenance, and others sent to work on the docks. What made up the meat of the prison, however, came in the “Prison Industries” sector. This comprised of the network of factories beyond the prison walls, located on the northwestern region of the island. There was the Laundry and Dry-Cleaning unit, where inmates did loads of washing for the Military. Those at the Cobblers Shop and Tailor Shop mended shoes and created gloves, raincoats, brooms, brushes, furniture, and rubber mats, respectively. Other departments of the Prison Industries worked in gardening and repairs. At times when the billowing fog around the San Francisco Bay was too dense for guards to properly monitor the inmates, all work was canceled. Instead, inmates were made to sit around in their cells all day.

In the years of World War II, Alcatraz inmates were made to show their patriotism. A bulletin board was placed outside the Mess Hall with regular

updates to keep the inmates up to date with important news. The factories of the Prison Industries sector were converted to fit the needs of the war. Inmates began sewing military uniforms, cargo nets for the Navy, as well as repairing and maintenance of buoys for submarine nets.

Perhaps the most savage aspect of the unceasing routine was the rule of silence enforced by Warden Johnston – a practice that would last up to 1940. The strict code of absolute silence, also known as “The Silent System,” or “The Silence Policy,” was detested by the inmates, who mockingly referred to him as “Old Saltwater” behind his back. This was neither Johnston's first rodeo, nor his first nickname. Prior to starting at Alcatraz, prisoners at San Quentin called him the “Golden Rule Warden.”

For the first 6 years, life in Alcatraz was depressingly somber, the air thick with vapid silence. Apart from short smoke breaks and time at the Rec Yard, conversation and any form of small talk was prohibited. Johnson defended his policy, and was quoted saying, “When escape-conscious men with established escape records are housed together, they are bound to talk and plot and plan and scheme and contrive to get away.”

The Silent System was eventually lifted, but not much else changed within the prisoners' routines. Even with work, inmates still averaged around 14 hours in their cells a day. Those in segregation had it worse; they were confined to their rooms for 23 hours. Entertainment was limited to reading and smoking, which most prisoners immersed themselves in heartily. This was an era when smoking was heavily encouraged around the country, as it was to the inmates. The majority of the prison population were chain smokers, and authorities decided it was best to provide the seeming necessity in an effort to prevent outrage from nicotine-addicted inmates. Packages of *Wings* cigarettes and corncob pipes were issued to every prisoner, as well as pipe-tobacco dispensers installed at the end of every cell block. There were also dispensers for generic rolling papers, where inmates could roll their own cigarettes. Later, radio broadcasts were brought into the prison, much to the prisoners' delight.

The inmates' cells were furnished with the most basic of necessities. A single bulb with a pull-chain was placed in every cell, along with a bed suspended with chains and a folding desk-and-chair set. One shelf was propped up on each of the cell walls, where prisoners were allowed to keep

their toiletries and personal items. Each cell was also equipped with a small mirror, shoe polish, toilet paper, and a broom for sweeping up. Finally, a toilet bowl, wash basin, 3 clothing pegs, and a ventilation shaft completed the interior design. Inmates were allowed to shower twice a week, with a dozen inmates to a shower room at a time. The inmates took comfortable, steamy showers, but had to have their clean and soiled garments inspected by guards upon entry and exit. Private stalls were initially used at Alcatraz, but the walls were removed in later years.

One of the privileges inmates with good behavior had access to were letters. Those who made the cut were allowed 2 letters out per week to approved recipients. With that said, all the letters that made it in and out of Alcatraz were strictly monitored. Authorities would censor the letters, as well as scramble some of the wording to prevent the exchange of secret codes. Well-behaved inmates were also granted one visit from immediate family members over 16 years of age with clean records. The only meetings all inmates were allowed were private face-to-face sessions with their legal consultants. Their meetings were often held in the offices of A Block.

The inmates were allowed free use of the library, which boasted over 15,000 volumes of literary works. Most were wholesome literature, which were handpicked by the local chaplain; books centered on sex and crime were prohibited. Inmates were given the chance to request new books and subscribe to approved magazines found in a catalog. To add to the “wholesome” atmosphere, Protestant and Catholic clergymen would visit the prison every Sunday to conduct services. Rabbis also visited the inmates during Jewish holidays.

According to officials, Alcatraz prisoners had by far, the best food in the system. Each inmate was said to have raked in at least 3,000 calories per day, as opposed to the recommended 2,100. Pastries and bread were baked from scratch, along with a colorful array of fruits and vegetables. Inmates were allowed as much food as they wanted, but would be punished for leaving food on their trays. Leaving scraps meant the guards were free to deprive the inmate of their next meal, with the punishment intensifying upon every offense.

Many would be surprised to learn that beyond the prison walls of the island, lay a well-functioning, beloved community of 300 civilians. These

were the family members of the guards and officials that worked on Alcatraz Island. Ernest B. Lageson, the son of a former officer and Alcatraz newsboy, gushed to the media that he had nothing but “happy memories” on the island.

The dramatically gated community had its own quaint, small-town charm. The 60 to 80 children who lived on the island often played together. Ball games, jumping rope, billiards, and fishing were all activities the community enjoyed. There was even an Alcatraz ballet center that held practices twice a week for the younger girls on the island. A post office, soda shop, bowling alley, and general store could be found on the island, which gave the extra sentiment of home. Even with the convenience of the general store, most of the shopping was still done in the mainland. Families could get there whenever they pleased, as a motor ferry boat made 20 trips to and from the mainland per day.

Social events were abundant, ranging from Christmas gatherings, to potlucks, and costume parties. Families passed down recipes over the generations, compiling them into a cookbook. Fleet Week was a crowd favorite, as the families had perfect view of the incoming ships. The only downside a few complained about were the frequent power shortages, as the community derived their power from a generator.

Once they were at the prison, every man faced a process that remained unchanged for most of Alcatraz’s history. The assistant warden at that time, C. J. Shuttleworth, would pass out a short list of rules that the inmates were expected to follow to the letter, and he also explained to them the consequences for breaking those rules: “You will receive your punishment of perhaps 10 days in isolation on a restricted diet of bread and water. That practice will continue while you remain in isolation, and you will be provided with medical care if required for any illness. Isolation is a dark cell known here as ‘the Hole.’ It consists of nothing but four walls, a ceiling, and a floor. When you sleep, you will be provided blankets for warmth and a pillow for your head, but you may be required to do so on concrete. When a prisoner’s required number of days in the Hole expires, he is placed in what is known as Solitary Confinement. Here he enjoys the nighttime use of a bunk. He gets bread and water for breakfast, a noon meal the same as on the prison main line, and bread and water before he goes to bed. When he is released from solitary he goes to his regular cell in the main prison. He will

be placed in 'grade.' Grade will consist of the following: He will have a red tag placed on the cell plate of his door, which will indicate third grade. He may leave his cell only to go to the dining room for scheduled meals. This will continue for three months. If he has not violated any rules for this period, he will be elevated to second grade. Now he will be able to write and receive a restricted number of letters. When he performs satisfactorily at this level, he will be promoted to first grade, where he will enjoy instatement of all normal prison privileges."

Henri Young, who killed a fellow inmate in Alcatraz in 1941, had a far more colorful description of the "Hole": "Its size was approximately that of a regular cell - 9 feet by 5 feet by about 7 feet high. I could just touch the ceiling by stretching out my arm... You are stripped nude and pushed into the cell. Guards take your clothes and go over them minutely or what few grains of tobacco may have fallen into the cuffs or pockets. There is no soap. No tobacco. No toothbrush, The smell – well you can describe it only by the word 'stink.' It is like stepping into a sewer. It is nauseating. After they have searched your clothing, they throw it at you. For bedding, you get two blankets, around 5 in the evening. You have no shoes, no bed, no mattress- nothing but the four damp walls and two blankets. The walls are painted black. Once a day I got three slices of bread-no-that is an error. Some days I got four slices. I got one meal in five days, and nothing but bread in between. In the entire thirteen days I was there, I got two meals... I have seen but one man get a bath in solitary confinement, in all the time that I have been there. That man had a bucket of cold water thrown over him."

In 1935, one prisoner called Alcatraz "the toughest pen I've ever seen. The hopelessness of it really gets to you. Capone feels it. Everybody does." In 1937, inmate Burton Phillips wrote to Bureau of Prisons Director James Bennett, "Are you to put me in here for life, stop all my mail and deny me the right of legal redress by keeping me in ignorance of legal decisions? Then I would be better off to slit my throat, or perhaps, someone else's and make you hang me, ending quickly and mercifully a life which would otherwise be carried on tortuously year after weary year without hope or possibilities of legal release. I'll grant you the point that there is nothing in the Constitution to keep you from starving, torturing and mistreating me but it must be a regrettable oversight on your part to deny me full access to legal documents."



Phillips

While most prisoners were housed within the general population area of the prison, a few had to be segregated because they were considered dangerous to the other prisoners. According to one brochure published at the time, "A special treatment unit called D Block is walled off from the rest of the institution for the housing of those few prisoners who must be kept locked in their cells at all times except for certain periods of exercise in the yard. In this unit some of the cell doors are operated electronically but are controlled by the cell house officer and the officer in the gun gallery working together. When a door is to be opened, the cell house officer pushes the appropriate button in his control box and then signals to the officer in the gallery. The latter then presses an electronic button in his control box, which opens the door."



David Ohmer's picture of D Block



Early 20th century picture of D Block

Not surprisingly, those in charge liked to make much of the services provided to the prisoners, with one brochure proclaiming, “For those interested in really improving their time, extension courses are available through the courtesy and cooperation of the University of California, Pennsylvania State College, and the International Correspondence School. Because of space limitations and the essential restrictions of maximum custody, classroom activity is not possible. However, inmate students show keen interest in education and enroll in a variety of subjects, ranging from differential calculus to foreign languages to English and engineering. Art, too, is a popular outlet; approximately 20 percent of the population do some painting in oils or in pastels. Exhibitions of their work have been displayed in the San Francisco area and in Washington, D.C.”

In early 1936, Alcatraz’s first inmate died, and his death sparked rioting and drew unwanted and unflattering attention to the prison, especially after Dr. George Hess, the prison’s Chief Medical Officer, submitted his report to the United States Surgeon General. It read in part, “On January 13, 1936, the above named man called for the doctor. Doctor Jacobsen was on duty and

responded to the call. After an examination of the patient, the doctor decided that there was no acute pathology present but did give the man some medicine. He then instructed the guard on duty not to call him anymore about this case, that the patient would be all right. ... The following morning at 8:00 AM, I saw the patient in the cell house and immediately had him brought to the hospital. Shortly after admitting him to the hospital I made a tentative diagnosis of a probable perforated gastric ulcer. We decided that an operation was in order and at 1:15 PM, an exploratory operation was started. ... The next morning there developed an acute edema of the left chest and the patient became unconscious, remaining in this condition until he died at 1:28 PM, January 17, 1936. ... The unfortunate thing is that the doctor did not recognize the condition at the first visit, and although this might not have played a major part in the fatal outcome, it certainly made a very bad impression on the inmate population and on others. Another unfortunate thing, for the patient, was the more or less general feeling that the man exaggerated minor complaints. This is the first mortality at this station under the present regime. It is unfortunate that it had to happen at this time when the inmates were in a state of unrest. It seemed to be the spark that was needed by the leader to incite followers into rioting.”

Still, the men remained under the supervision of the prison doctor the whole time, and the doctor could alter their diets if he deemed it necessary for their health. Johnston noted, “Sometimes the menu is added to on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer, even during the earlier stages of incarceration in solitary or isolation. When a prisoner is removed from solitary and it is thought necessary to keep him in open isolation for a longer period of time, he begins his time in isolation with one full meal and two light meals each day. If he is continued in isolation for more than a week, he is given two full meals and one light meal daily. If it is decided to keep him in isolation for a long period of time, he is given three full meals a day, the same as the main line.”

While most of the prisoners were able to cope with the harsh conditions and the rules of the prison, it proved to be too much for some. Among that first batch of inmates arriving in the fall of 1934 was Edward Wutke, a 36 year old seaman who had killed his best friend in a drunken brawl. While initially not considered a dangerous criminal, he became emotionally withdrawn while serving his sentence and was transferred to Alcatraz

because he was judged to have a “desperate disposition.” Once there, he found himself in constant trouble with the warden and was often put in solitary confinement. After several suicide attempts, he finally succeeded on November 13, 1937. According to Deputy Warden E.J. Miller, “Approximately 2:40 this morning I was awakened by the telephone. Upon answering the telephone, found it was Lieutenant Weinhold stating that he believed Wutke had cut his throat in his cell and that he had notified the Doctor. Told Lieutenant Weinhold that I would be there immediately. It was about 2:50 AM when we opened the cell door and Doctor Beacher entered with me into the cell. Wutke was sitting on the toilet bowl in a drooping position with his back braced against the corner of the wall. The cell was quite bloody and the sheets and blankets were full of blood. Doctor Beacher examined the man and said that he was dead and stated that about 2:35 AM was approximately the time of death. The body was removed from the cell to the hospital. I then called Warden Johnston stating that the man had committed suicide and was pronounced dead by the doctor and moved to the Morgue. I had Lieutenant Weinhold search the cell to find out what he had used and he found that Wutke had cut his throat with a small blade from a pencil sharpener fastened in the head of the safety razor.”

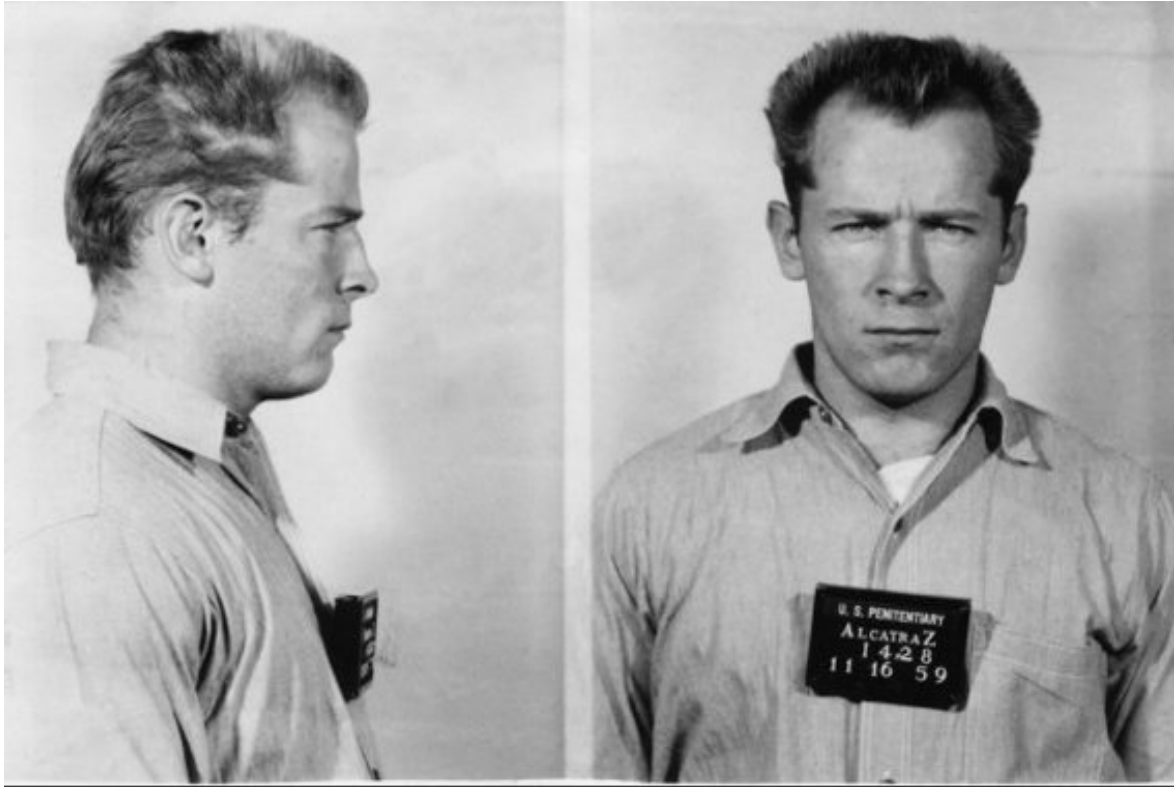


A picture of Alcatraz's morgue

Wutke became the first man on the island to die by his own hand, and his death led to a review of the prison's disciplinary policies. Bennett wrote to Johnston, "It is unnecessary to impose such rigorous rules," and he later explained in his memoirs, "Discipline in prisons is frequently confounded with punishment. Punishment or deprivations are sometimes necessary to hold some men in line, but the measures taken to instruct and train men are more important. Discipline is systematic training to secure submission to authority. The value of discipline is the respect it induces in individuals and the resultant good order of the group. When discussing the discipline for prisoners we should keep in mind the purpose of the prison. Alcatraz is reserved by the government for perplexing problem prisoners and organized on the basis of maximum security with every precaution taken to ensure safekeeping of prisoners and to prevent the possibility of escape. Privileges are limited, supervision is strict, routine is exacting, discipline is firm, but there is no cruelty or undue harshness, and we insist upon decent regard for the humanities."

Chapter 4: A Unique Band of Brothers

“We were all part of a unique band of brothers.” – James Whitey Bulger, Inmate #1428



Whitey Bulger

Naturally, the Alcatraz inmates formed their own hierarchy and code of conduct within the fortified walls. Tim Dees, a retired cop and Criminal Justice professor, shed his insight on the inmate “pecking order.” As with every community, particularly with one where humans are made to live in such close proximity with one another, a power struggle emerges.

In most prisons, serial killers and high-ranking members of crime organizations are most likely placed on top of the tier. While there are the modern day leaders of the Crips, Bloods, Latin Kings, Black Guerrilla Family, Aryan Brotherhood, and so on, back then, the inmates who ran the prisons were former big-shot mobsters from the Mafia. On the next level, there are the members of these prison gangs, or “soldiers.” Their sworn alliance is what bonds them. Simply put, an insult to one of them is an

insult to all of them. Next, are the majority of general population – regular inmates with no gang affiliations, most of which are just looking to do their time with no distractions.

The less-than-desirable levels beyond that are what many inmates hope to avoid. Those considered “weak” and easily pushed around are often made “wives” of prisoners. These “wives” are tasked with cleaning, and are commonly subjected to performing sexual acts. There are cases when inmates prefer the role, as this means that they would have someone to “protect” them in prison. Then, there are inmates who most of the general population feel have committed unforgivable crimes. These convicts are often rapists, child molesters and abusers, or those that have committed a crime against another inmate's loved ones. Inmates like these are often targeted as punching bags and are popular outlets for rage. Finally, scraping the bottom of the barrel, are the snitches.

Keeping up with the trend, many Alcatraz inmates were no stranger to gang life. Jim Quillen, a self-described young man with a “maladjusted attitude,” was sent to Alcatraz after being convicted of a robbery rampage and kidnapping in 1942. A hardened criminal himself with a 45-year sentence under his belt, Quillen recounted the gang activity inside Alcatraz.

Gang members were easier to spot, as they stalked the hallways menacingly in close-knit groups. Each group sported a different symbol that represented their gang, including colored sweat bands, bandannas, and visible tattoos. Gangs claimed and secured different territories around the recreation yard, otherwise known as their “turfs.” Quillen remembered many of those associated with gangs to be “loud, boisterous bullies,” most of which the veteran prisoners went out of their way to avoid. Conflicts between individual gang members were resolved as a whole, one gang against the other. Individuals with no affiliations to gangs who were unlucky enough to offend a gang member were often jumped unannounced. As Quillen put it, “Gang vengeance was often quick, quiet, and undetected until too late.”

Yet, gang or no gang, inmates often formed alliances of their own in an effort to smooth the rocky road of incarceration. One of these famous

friendships was between George “Machine Gun” Kelly and Basil “The Owl” Banghart. Correctional Officer Larry Quilligan described the pair who worked together in the Prison Industries as inseparable. Kelly, a well-known gangster of the Prohibition Era most famed for his peculiar choice of weapon, and Banghart, most known for his hoax kidnapping of a Chicago mobster, were often seen walking in repetitive circles around the yard, deep in laughter and jolly conversation. Another inmate named Willie Radkay, who lived next to Kelly, was another one of Kelly's closest acquaintances. When asked what Radkay remembered most about Kelly, the inmate shared that Kelly would accuse him of snoring every night, and smack him awake with a rolled up magazine. Another interesting note was that former correctional officers and inmates voted Kelly as one of the friendliest and approachable of the imprisoned.

Friendships between guards and inmates were not unheard of, either. One such case came with CO Frank Heaney and his direct subordinate, John Paul Chase. Regardless of the fact that Chase had been convicted of the murder of a federal officer, Heaney managed to extract the prisoner from his crime, and found common ground with him. They would chatter away as Heaney supervised Chase in the Cobbler Shop, often reminiscing about a beloved spot shared between them – Sausalito, California. Chase also enjoyed retelling the stories of his glory days, most of which revolved around his partner-in-crime, George “Baby Face” Nelson.

It appeared as if some of these inmates were in the system for so long, they had forgotten what it was like to function in the real world. This was evident in the case of Charles Berta. According to CO Ed Stucker, the inmate was the “toughest man” he had ever come across. A well-known armed robber, Berta had a long rap sheet ranging from grand theft auto at age 18 to robbing and violently assaulting a postal vehicle and its messenger. Despite the violent nature of his crimes, Berta kept his head low in confinement, keeping to his job as a metal worker at the Blacksmith Shop. When Berta was finally released in 1949, he was often spotted perched upon a bench, gazing wistfully at Alcatraz Island. Officer Quilligan concluded, “Prison was all that he knew. That's where all of his friends were.”

As unlikely as it was, there was a softer aspect of Alcatraz. One aspect came in the form of gardening as rehabilitation. Elliot Michener, was one of these seeming success stories, a convict who was charged with counterfeiting, then transferred to Alcatraz upon an failed escape attempt from Leavenworth Prison. In Alcatraz, Michener was deemed trustworthy by the guards after he returned a misplaced key to one of the guards. From then on, he was assigned to gardening duty, where he discovered his green thumb. Over the years, Michener planted beautiful plots of cottage-style gardens around the island, and was soon promoted to houseboy for Warden Edwin B. Swope. When he was shipped back to Leavenworth, he expressed his sorrow over having to leave his gardens. Michener was eventually released and went on to make an honest living. Other inmates who found solace in gardening were Richard Franseen, another counterfeiter, and Albert Smith, convicted of 4 counts of robbery.

On a darker note, one of the most sobering facets revolved around the once-taboo topic of homosexuality. A blog entitled, *The LGBT Institute*, found that many of the earliest prisoners of Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary had been convicted on acts of “sodomy” while in the military. Inmates such as Frank Lucas Bolt, the very first inmate, Alan Whitney Hood, William G. Payne, and Angelo George Paris were all convicted of the same crime. With the exception of Paris, who was sentenced to 10 years, the rest had their freedom revoked for 5. Paris' medical report listed his repeated brushes with the law due to his “abnormal sexual traits.” Along with dozens of other inmates found arrested solely on sodomy charges, none were found to have squeaky clean records otherwise. On a separate matter, other inmates charged with forcible sodomy, aggravated assault, and rape tacked on more years.

In Alcatraz Island, fornication between prisoners were seen as “obscene practices,” and met with “severe punishment.” For better insight into the public mentality at the time, we turn to the highly controversial Terman-Miles study from 1936. A fifth of the *Sex and Personality* study attempted to examine the behaviors of male homosexuals. This involved examining a group of what authorities called “active homosexuals” from Alcatraz, and a separate group from the San Francisco County Jail. The Alcatraz prisoners, who were convicted on sodomy charges, vehemently denied

their homosexuality. Among their offensive findings was the generalization that all “passive homosexuals” were introverted and effeminate, whereas “active” homosexuals were inherently more “masculine.” Perhaps it was with baseless “psychological” and “professional” tests such as these prompted such unease with the subject.

Though it was considered unmentionable, as with every prison, many of the inmates in Alcatraz were involved in romantic relationships. Even so, in line with the unpredictable winds of prison, some of these relationships turned deadly. The tale of CO George DeVincenzi's first day at Alcatraz is a disturbing one. 30 minutes into DeVincenzi's first-ever shift, the hapless guard came face-to-face with murder in one of the barber shops.

DeVincenzi watched as Freddy Lee Thomas, the barber, proceeded to give his partner, Joseph Barsock, a haircut. The two conversed in low whispers, to which DeVincenzi paid little attention to. Without warning, Thomas plunged the shears into Barsock's neck, wielding his arm back and striking blows in his lungs and heart. Before DeVincenzi and the other guards could pry them apart, Thomas planted a kiss on a gurgling Barsock's forehead, whispering, “I love you.” The day after the murder, all barber shop shears were replaced with electric clippers.

Yet another important and seldom discussed aspect of Alcatraz prison life was the treatment of the African American inmates. In the days of Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary, the prejudice against blacks was a commonly shared sentiment. African American inmates were herded to the opposite cell blocks, away from Caucasian inmates. They were assigned tables at the opposite end of the Mess Hall, worked in separate locations, and mingled with their own race at the Rec Yard. Even the barber shops were separated, with barbers grooming only those of their shared race. Philip Bergen, a former captain of the Alcatraz guards, recalled its attempt at integration during the early years of the prison. Trouble immediately sparked off, as the majority of the prison population at the time were made up of “hostile rednecks,” which vastly outnumbered the black population.

Black criminals of the time – with many arguing its ongoing practice today – were often slapped with severe sentences for menial crimes.

Robert Lipscomb was one of these inmates, who was sentenced to 25 years behind bars for the possession of 17 counterfeit 20-dollar bills. When Lipscomb attempted to speak up for the black community, he was thrown in “The Hole,” 24 hours a day, for weeks.

With that in mind, not all inmates had problems with their “colored” or white counterparts. Many found themselves colorblind in prison, and formed alliances and meaningful friendships with inmates of different races. One such case came with William “Ty” Martin, who created an elaborate, but ultimately unsuccessful escape plan with several white inmates. Then, there was Bumpy Johnson, often referred to as the “Black Al Capone,” or the “Godfather of Harlem.” Johnson was rumored to have been good friends with Frank Morris and the Anglin Brothers, aiding them in their famous 1962 escape. It was said that Johnson had singlehandedly kept the 200 black inmates at bay as the trio hatched their escape plans.

Chapter 5: Riots, Strikes, and the Battle of Alcatraz

“The men confined there [Alcatraz], to all intents and purposes, are...little more than animated cadavers – dead men who are still able to walk and talk.” – Roy Gardner, Inmate 110

Another haunting feature that plagues the prison system are the one too many allegations of maltreatment and abuse of inmates. The island penitentiary was another one of these institutions. Many of the horrors Alcatraz inmates found themselves subjected to are not for the faint of heart.

First, there were the accusations of beatings from crooked guards, a claim that Warden Johnston pointedly denied until the day of his death. There were several inmates who begged to differ in their trial testimonies. One of these inmates was Harmon Waley, a convicted kidnapper. A troubled individual, he had attempted suicide on 2 separate occasions. Waley often described his anguish in his letters home to his family about being the government's “favorite whipping boy.” He claimed that he was often sent to solitary confinement for trivial reasons, and was often knocked around by the guards.

In another case, Officer Heaney penned in his memoir that he knew of other guards who carried blackjacks with them at all times. Blackjacks were heavy rubber clubs that could cause serious damage, and was illegal. Heaney attested that these guards, which were mostly senior officers, brandished their blackjacks whenever they could, beating unruly and wisecracking inmates to submission.

Another vessel of torture was force-feeding. The process involved ramming a tube down an individual's throat, funneling liquids and concoctions of milk, sugar, and raw eggs against their will. In the 1950s, when an unidentified Puerto Rican inmate went on a week's fast for Lent, authorities were ready to implement the procedure. Thankfully, when the island's Catholic priest intervened, authorities backed off.

Many inmates accused a few of the guards of being sadistic, delighting in the inmates' misery. One of these inmates was Alvin “Creepy” Karpis, who

recalled a particularly evil guard. The guard blasted the air-conditioning in the isolation cells of D Block. When prisoners tried to remedy the frigid cold by stuffing balled up tissue paper into the vent grills, the guard would use a hook to fish them right back out. Other inmates told of the dreaded hosings. Guards would aim the nozzles of hoses at disruptive and isolated inmates, dousing them with ice-cold water, and leaving them in their drenched state until they dried out on their own.

Some of these inmates would exact revenge against these guards. Take Senior Officer Royal Cline, who was killed during a failed escape attempt by inmates Thomas Limerick, Rufus Franklin, and James Lucas. Many hailed him a hero, but former inmates shared that Cline had been especially targeted for his supposed harsh treatment of the prisoners. In the case of Burton "Whitey" Phillips, Warden Johnston himself was put under the microscope. When Phillips lunged at Johnston and roughed up the warden in an unprovoked attack, Phillips was shunned to D Block. Phillips only made it back to general population after Warden Johnston retired, which was not until several years later.

As previously mentioned, Johnston's highly unpopular rule of silence was not only loathed by all the inmates, some of the inmates more than cracked under the pressure. Rufe Persful, a convicted gangster and bank robber, was one of those driven to delirium.

On June 25, 1937, while Persful worked amongst the cleanup crew, something within him snapped. In the midst of a sweeping, he flung his broom aside, and strode up to a glinting hatchet. While his colleagues had their backs turned, he laid his left hand flat on the table, and raised the hatchet over his head. In one swift, deliberate motion, he hacks off 4 of his splayed fingers. As the other inmates immediately rushed to his aid, Persful begged one of them to chop off his other hand. Authorities believed that Persful had been so desperate to leave the island, he had suffered a psychotic episode. Ultimately, Persful was granted his wish and was able to leave Alcatraz, but was subsequently transferred to a Missouri hospital for the criminally insane.

It was with Persful's case that Alcatraz officials were forced to cease and desist the barbaric silence policy. Many claimed that the policy should have

been nipped in the bud years ago, as inmates found ways to get around the rule. One of these methods was to flush the toilets of 2 cells at the same time. When the water was scooped out of the bowl, it created a telephone-esque system. Major authority figures had gotten wind of the harsh policies in the secretive primary years of Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary, many of which called for the prison to shut its doors. One of these advocates was Attorney General Frank Murphy, who declared Alcatraz an “institution conducive to psychology.”

But for the inmates at Alcatraz, their worst case scenarios entailed having to spend even a minute in solitary confinement. In the early years of the island detainment center, while troublemakers were kept in D Block, the most serious offenders were dragged to “The Dungeon.” Technically, The Dungeon was not a dungeon, but an ancient collection of storage rooms the military used as segregation units during the days of Fort Alcatraz. Though there were no reports of any Alcatraz inmates spending years in The Dungeon, there was one particular tenant that stood out from the rest.

Joe Bowers, a mentally incompetent inmate, who was serving 25 years for Postal Mail Robbery with a loot of \$16.38, spent well over the 19-day limit the penitentiary allowed for confinement. Like every inmate that entered The Dungeon, Bowers was forced to strip naked and stand in the nude to watch as the guards searched his clothes. Only when the guards were satisfied were the clothes returned. The windowless room was tightly sealed, including the slits on the sides of the door. Inmates were made to wallow in the pitch-black darkness, seeing absolutely nothing, and hearing the rhythmic dripping from the cisterns. Their only human interaction came when the guards showed their faces briefly twice a day to bring them small amounts of food and water.

Inmates reported undergoing multiple bouts of hallucination, as well as extreme sensory disorientation. After Bowers' stay in The Dungeon, fellow inmates and guards stated that the man was never the same. Not long after, Bowers would become the first man to attempt escape from Alcatraz. During work duty, Bowers sprinted towards a wall. Before he could make it over the edge, he was shot and killed on site. Many attributed the brutality of The Dungeon to the desperate act.

The Dungeon later formally closed its doors when the media began honing in on these incidents. Authorities decided The Dungeon was no longer suitable, as the damp, decaying brick walls housing the inmates were ready to give way. In order to keep the inmates from tunneling themselves out of their cells, they had to be inhumanely restrained with shackles at all times. In an effort to peel the public eye off of him, Warden Johnston called The Dungeon to a close.

Another important case that shed light to the mental breakdowns in the island came with inmate Henri Young. After a thwarted escape from Alcatraz in 1939, along with Rufus McCain and 3 other accomplices, both Young and McCain were sent to solitary confinement. Both spent over 22 months in confinement before they were released back to the general population. Soon after, both began work in the workshops, with McCain at the Tailor Shop, and Young at the Furniture Shop on the floor above. On December 3, 1940, Young dashed down the stairs and made a beeline for McCain, thrusting a knife tool into his neck. McCain succumbed to his injuries 5 hours later.

When Young was put on trial for McCain's murder, his attorneys reprimanded Alcatraz authorities for alleged beatings over the years, and keeping him in solitary confinement for such a gross length of time. A term rarely heard of at the time, they cited what they called “cruel and unusual punishment.” It was their belief that their client was just as much a victim, unwillingly triggered by the hostile environment he had grown accustomed to. In the end, the jury sympathized with Young, and found him guilty of manslaughter, a dramatically reduced sentence. When Young's case concluded, the Public Works Administration poured over a million dollars into revamping the cells of D Block. A “Special Treatment Unit” was created, a highly-secured isolation area designed to hold the worst of upcoming troublemakers.

Even with the million-dollar renovations, life in The Hole was hardly any better. Inmate Jim Quillen was one of those who spent the maximum 19 days of his solitary confinement sentence. Quillen knew that the 19 days maximum was mostly a front, as inmates who were not “rehabilitated” were brought out for a quick meal and brush of their teeth, and marched right back into their cells for another 19-day cycle.

The Hole was virtually soundproof, with nothing but the thoughts in the inmates' heads to keep them company, the very same that would ease some to insanity. Quillen's days started out with the same 6:30 bell that roused him from his tense slumber. Inmates in The Hole were fed the same meals as the other inmates, but all their food would be lumped together on the tray.

But what Quillen found most difficult to bear was the feeling of total isolation from the world. If it were not for the regular distribution of the food trays, the mind-numbing monotony made it almost impossible to distinguish day from night. In order to pass the time, Quillen fashioned a simple game. Taking a button from his uniform, he would flick the button up in the air. He then spun around in circles, dropped to his knees, and pawed the floors for the button, a game he would play over and over again until the energy drained from his limbs. Quillen claimed the game played a significant role in “retaining his sanity.”

The psychological tortures afflicted on an unknown number of Alcatraz prisoners are a depressing reminder of the fragility of mental health. One report stated that as many as 32 inmates had been carted out of Alcatraz in straitjackets in the couple of years leading up to Young's trial. A staggering 36 inmates were determined enough to take their dreams of freedom to the next level, reaching for a likely doomed, but preferred reality. Even big-time mobster Al Capone admitted to Warden Johnston that Alcatraz had “gotten him licked,” before slowly fading into obscurity.

When inmates grew restless or felt that their desires were falling to deaf ears, they resorted to strikes, protests, and riots to express their disdain. The majority of these protests were hunger and work strikes. With much of the mainland relying on the Prison Industries factories, the inmates utilized this snippet of information to their advantage.

It dawned to the prisoners that threatening to cease all work would trigger a domino effect. Not only would the circulation of clean clothes for the Army come to a halt, the contracted manufacturing quotas for raincoats, gloves, and furniture would fall short. If the prisoners held out long enough, the phone at the warden's office would be ringing off the hook, blasted with furious tirades from his superiors in Washington. The same logic applied to hunger strikes. If an inmate chose not to eat, they were putting themselves at

risk, directly making the prison authorities liable. If word made it off the island, the warden would be treated to yet another earful from Washington, along with the poking noses of the press.

The year 1940 was a particularly eventful year when it came to strikes and protests. Spurred by the nationwide food shortage, Alcatraz saw 2 major hunger and work strikes in the spring and summer. One of the most fascinating food riots came exactly a decade later – the “Spaghetti Riot” of 1950. Tired of the “bland starch” that was their spaghetti lunch of the day, the under-the-breath grumblings of the inmates escalated to full-blown, noodle-flinging pandemonium. The situation had gotten so out of control that guards deployed teargas canisters as they fired their roaring machine guns to get the inmates to pipe down. Many were baffled by the riot, as Alcatraz was widely considered to have the best grub in the system. An Alcatraz menu from 1946 showed a more than promising selection that included hot pancakes and stewed peaches for breakfast; baked meatloaf drizzled in pan-gravy and mashed potatoes for lunch; and stuffed baked meat croquettes for dinner.

The Mess Hall was considered a major hot spot for violent riots. Hungry inmates were the easiest to tick off, and it was unwise to get on their bad side when they were armed with sharp utensils – sometimes even knives for steak night. Inmates who were looking to avoid certain inmates they had “beef” with had nowhere to hide when the whole population congregated for mealtimes. As a result, security at The Mess Hall was almost always airtight. At times, prisoners would flip tables and break out into unexpected, bloody fistfights. Then, there were those that were known to stir up ruckuses for an even more diversified menu. The Rec Yard was another common base for unruly activity. Inmates felt their freest at the yard, where mob mentalities were most likely to take place.

One of the most disconcerting protests in Alcatraz took place in 1960. With motives that still escape authorities to this day, the guards found themselves facing a prison-wide “lay-in” strike. Every single prisoner refused to leave their cells. Their insubordination lasted a week long, until 12 of the suspected ringleaders were thrown into solitary confinement. 3 of these leaders, who protested the ban of desserts and cigarettes in The Hole, had managed to acquire razor blades. They sliced open their Achilles

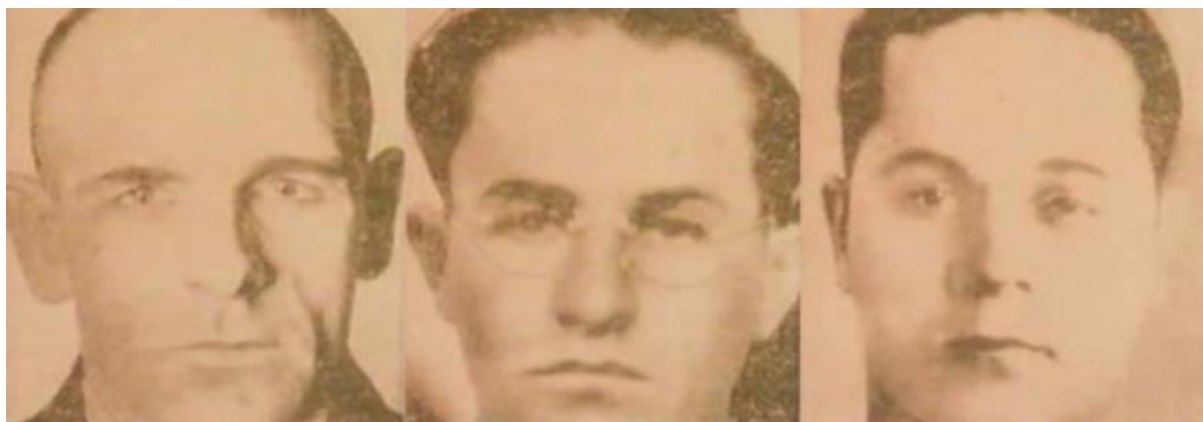
tendons, mutilating and disabling themselves. The other 9 leaders followed suit, but only succeeded in “scratching” at their heels. As a result, the 3 were able to enjoy as many cakes and cigarettes as they wanted during their 3-week hospital recovery.

There were times when all it took was one “stir crazy” inmate to provoke the rest of them. These incidents were often caused by an explosive individual who either wanted to express his discontent, or let off steam. They wreaked havoc in their own cells, banging on the bars and every metal surface in their quarters, and screaming at the top of their lungs. Insults and obscenities were often hurled at guards by inmates looking to incite reactions. New Year's Eve was a crowd favorite for the inmates' chaotic tantrums, many who were especially distressed about being away from their loved ones. Inmates would set anything flammable ablaze, wreck their toilets to purposely flood the floors, and tossed out whatever they could squeeze through the bars of their cells.

Some inmates chose to protest in different ways, by filing legal briefs to voice the “unjust” conditions at Alcatraz. With nothing but time on their hands, many buried their noses in law books, learning everything they could about the law. However, as their luck would have it, most of the complaints filed were regarded as “frivolous motions” with no real groundings.

The Battle of Alcatraz began on the morning of May 2, 1946 when inmate Bernard Coy put into action a plan that he had concocted to attempt an escape from the prison. Working with Marvin Hubbard, Joseph Cretzer, and Clarence Carnes, he was able to overpower a guard and squeeze between two of the bars protecting the gun gallery. From there, he passed on weapons to his cohorts, and the four men liberated about a dozen more inmates in D Block, the infamous isolation unit. However, of the 12 men they freed, only two, Sam Shockley and Miran Thompson, joined them. Inmate Henri Young, who was in D Block at the time, recalled, “When that terrible escape attempt started I was writing a letter to Aunt Amelia. A while later I tore it up because if I didn't come through all the shooting I didn't want anyone else to read it. At first the shooting was light. Another fellow and I sat on the floor until he caught a deflected shell in his shoulder. He wasn't hurt badly. We however grabbed some mattresses and built a barricade at the front of the cell door. Then we stacked all my books up behind that. Things got

hotter. The noise of the gun firing was terrific. We crawled under my steel bunk and stayed there nearly all of the time.”



Coy, Hubbard, and Cretzer



Picture of the gun gallery

The plan called for the inmates to next make their way to the dock and use hostages to board the launch to the mainland, but they were quickly stymied

when they were unable to unlock their cellblock door. Instead, they found themselves trapped with nine guards as hostages and the prison alarm going off. In the meantime, Johnston dispatched the following telegraph to the FBI: “Serious Trouble...Convict has machine gun in cellhouse...Have issued riot call...Placed armed guards at strategic locations...Many of our officers are imprisoned in the cellhouse...Cannot tell extent of injuries suffered by our officers or amount of damage done...Will give you more information later in the day when we can control...J. A. Johnston, Warden, Alcatraz.”

Panicking, the prisoners foolishly decided to open fire on the guards they were holding and wounded five of them, including Bill Miller, who later died. At around 6:00 p.m. on May 2, a team of armed guards attempted to liberate their co-workers but instead were shot at and forced to retreat. This time, an officer, Harold Stites, was killed, and four other guards were wounded.

Two hours later, another team went in and successfully liberated the guards, and by this time, Johnston had brought in two platoons of Marines to help restore order. Jack Eoisie, writing for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, reported, “Five stout men, protected by a ledge about 100 yards directly beneath and out from the ‘hot’ cell block window, are doing the job of keeping the convicts from reaching the window ledge — and a possible dash for freedom through the shattered bars. They are doing the job by firing, about every five minutes, four fragmentation grenades launched from either an Army rifle or carbine. During the hours we watched, no other weapon was used — no bazookas and nor mortars. Earlier in the day, a few smoke grenades churned up outside the beleaguered cell. It is understood that of the five men who can be seen operating the grenade launcher with methodical precision, one is a Marine. He is Warrant Officer C.L. Beckner [sic], who commands the Marine detachment on the island. They are preparing to fire now. The grenade is inserted carefully into the launcher device attached to the muzzle of the gun. There is a slight report as the grenade leaves the gun, but it is drowned out by the sharp concussion as the projectile strikes the wall. A flash of yellow flame lights up, and then curling black smoke. This one, then, missed the cell, but immediately another is fired, and all that can be heard is a smothered concussion. Black smoke drifts out the window. Then one went in. Each grenade sprays the cell area with sharp metal for a

radius of 50 feet, forcing the convicts inside to keep down on the floor or behind sheltering objects in corners. Two more grenades are fired and then, the stronghold relaxes. The men can be seen lighting cigarettes and stretching out on the beds of bright purple flowers.”

Speaking from his perspective inside the prison, Henri Young described the scene: “Those anti-aircraft and anti-tank bombs the Navy and Marines threw into isolation lifted my cell up and crashed into my eardrums with an awful din. I’d lay there and wait to feel the pain from a fragment or a shell. But I never even got touched. The real close calls scared me. One came at the very first and one at the last. But after I got used to the firing I slept awhile over different periods. I raised up to take a look around the cell block during some of the heaviest firing. The place was truly beautiful. There was a steady stream of brilliant white and red flares casting their lights over everything. Tracer bullets were lancing through the smoke. Actually the worst of the whole thing physically was that pungent smoke from smoldering mattresses. I could hardly breath [sic] and my eyes ran a steady stream.”

In the end, most of the inmates were angry about all the problems the escape attempt had caused. Young concluded, “When I wasn’t sleeping or talking I was praying for all of us fellows, the officers I knew were in danger of getting killed, and that the officials and guards would have the courage to come in and capture those who had caused such horror. It was a sheer miracle that so few innocent inmates were slightly wounded. Even the guards couldn’t hardly believe their own eyes when they saw us all walking. There was a big colored fellow among us who was through the Italian Campaigns during the recent war. He laughed aloud and said that even Italy was never so bad as what we went through.”





A picture of tank shell holes on May 3

It took two days, but the guards finally regained control of the prison at about 9:30 a.m. on May 4. By this time, Coy, Cretzer and Hubbard had been killed, and Carnes later confided to Whitey Bulger that he was surprised to find himself still alive. Bulger later remembered, “Joe said he was sitting on the toilet, heard a noise and looked up; Mahan had a .45 caliber pistol pointed straight at him through the bars. He thought it was the end of him, but Mahan just stoically gestured with a wave of the pistol and walked him down to D Block. Never once did I see Mahan smile or in friendly conversation with other guards.” Since there was no evidence that he had killed anyone, Carnes received another life sentence on top of the one he was already serving, but Thompson and Shockley were later executed for their role in the death of the two guards.





Carnes, Shockley and Thompson in chains on their way to court





The bodies of Hubbard, Coy, and Cretzer in a San Francisco morgue

Meanwhile, guards and inmates alike struggled to recover. Prisoner Jim Quillen recalled, “The entire flat was covered with armed, nervous, and tired guards. Each guard had been assigned an inmate to cover as he stepped from his cell. The guard assigned to cover me was a stranger, possibly from another institution. He was armed with a shotgun and was so nervous that I could see the gun trembling in his hands.”

In the spring of 1948, Edwin Swope took over as the new warden at Alcatraz. Hardnosed, he told one newspaper that, under his strict hand, “It will be different, all right.” However, as hard as Swope was on the inmates, he was just as hard on his men. He took away the stools those in the guard tower sat on during their shifts and held them to the highest standard of professional behavior. Bergen noted, “Swope was a tough act. I can’t say that I ever liked him. He lived and died by the rules, and he didn’t let the inmates get away with killing a fly, or even the officers for that matter. I can remember working in D Block and Swope would check the ‘hole’ cells and make sure that the lights were turned off by the officers, and the fronts were closed. He wanted to make sure those men did hard time.”



Swope

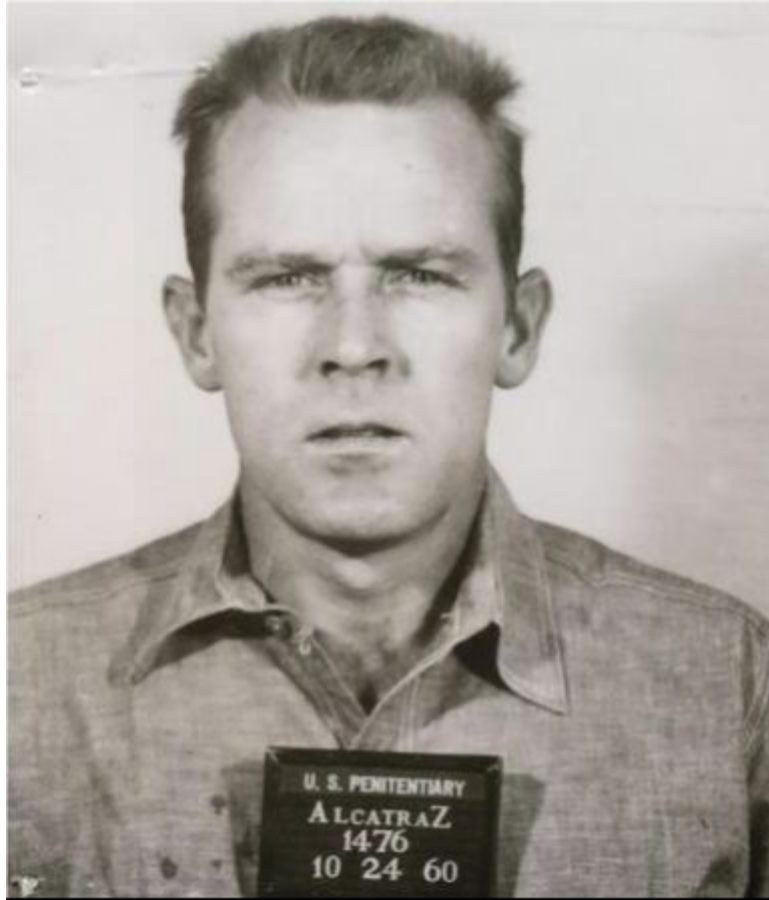
Chapter 6: Escape from Alcatraz

“I want them [the world] to know that these were more than criminals. These were human beings. They had a family...These were my uncles.” - Ken Widner, nephew of the Anglin brothers

One of Alcatraz’s most famous aspects is that despite all of the escape attempts, not a single inmate is known to have successfully escaped. That said, one escape attempt and the mysterious outcome of that attempt remain the stuff of legend.

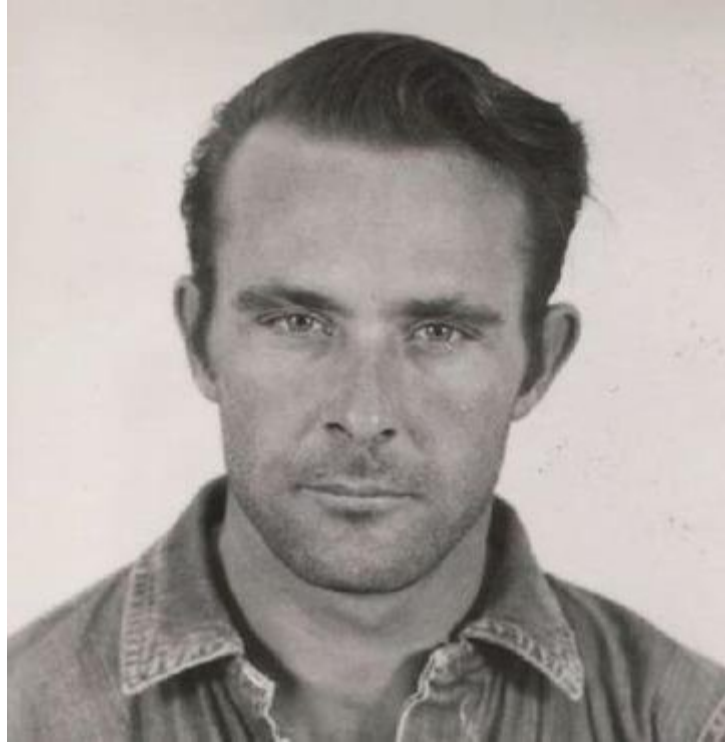
George Robert Anglin and Rachael Van Miller Anglin of Colquitt had a large family of 14 – seven boys and seven girls. The married couple would move to the neighboring town of Donalsonville, Georgia, before packing up and ultimately settling in the agricultural community of Ruskin, Florida. This would be the final home to many of the Anglin children's fond childhood memories.

John William Anglin was born on the 2nd of May in 1930. A year and nine days after that, out came his younger brother Clarence. And then there was Alfred, three years John's senior, the lesser known of the Anglin clan. Despite the fact that the media rarely shines a light on Alfred, the oldest of the three played a significant role in his brother's lives.



John Anglin

Alfred was a lanky boy and had a narrow face with thin features. John, on the other hand, had bright blonde hair and clear-blue eyes. Clarence was a slightly stockier boy with hazel-blue eyes. He and John shared the same naturally high hairline, but his brown hair was as dark as Alfred's. Though the three were gifted with varying physical traits from the gene pool, they shared an innate sense of restless ambition that drew them to one another. The brothers were virtually inseparable.



Clarence Anglin

Trouble had always been synonymous with the three Anglin brothers. In their preteens, the boys would start out with simple mischief such as skipping school and nabbing watermelons from local fruit stands. The young boys stole to buy their family nicer food, clothes, and toys than what their parents could afford on their scant income. When they grew older, their naughty behavior graduated to petty crime. At the age of 14, authorities caught Clarence red-handed as he was trying to break into a service station. Soon after that, the three brothers would begin the tradition of their two week excursions. They would pile into the family car with little cash and sometimes none at all, scouring the South for “opportunities” to help support their family financially.

By the time they were young adults in the 1950s, they'd become regulars in different county jails for theft and robbery. Acquaintances of the brothers have said that they aimed to avoid confrontation and harming others. When business owners closed their doors, however, that was what they considered “fair game.” They would proceed to break in and loot money and store items in the dead of the night. Interestingly enough, the brothers had always had a knack for evading prison authorities. Like the

reformatory schools they would constantly break out of, the brothers would escape from nearly every state prison they'd been caged in. Once they felt they had served their due time, whether or not they'd met the end of their sentence, they were going.

On January 17, 1958, John drove Alfred and Clarence to the Bank of Columbia in Columbia, Alabama. The three proceeded to enter the bank with a toy pistol and made off with a total of \$18,911 USD (approximately \$155,530 in buying power today) in cash and \$4,570 (around \$37,585) in traveler's checks which they distributed three ways. To this day, the Anglin family insists that they had chosen the toy pistol for the safety of others, in place, risking only their own lives. Others surmised that it was because the brothers believed that by doing so, they'd get a lesser sentence. Reports from the robbery entailed that the young men had strolled up to a bank teller and “politely” asked for the loot. Witnesses told authorities that when a woman had fainted, Clarence had allegedly fetched her a glass of water and fanned her until she came to.

Unbeknownst to the brothers, the bank was federally insured. Additionally, they had apparently left fingerprints all over the bank and stolen getaway vehicle. Within four days the FBI was hot on their trail, and found them camping out in Hamilton, Ohio. Nearly all stolen funds were recovered. Though their choice of weapon was a toy pistol, the FBI charged the brothers with armed robbery. Alfred and Clarence were both given 15 years, and John 10. At the time, the state of Alabama sought the death penalty for armed robbery. Because the brothers pled guilty, another 25 years apiece was stacked onto their sentences instead, but in short order, John and Clarence would attempt to escape, which led to them being sent to Alcatraz, where they would subsequently make one of history's most famous attempts.

Not much is known about the early years of Frank Lee Morris, the third of the legendary escapees. Still, the inexplicable character is commonly credited as the main mastermind of the escape. Frank was born on the 1st of September in 1928 at Gallinger Hospital in Washington, D.C. Young Frank was orphaned at the age of 11, and bounced around from one foster home to another.



Frank Morris

Frank was what prison officials referred to as a “professional inmate.” He was in and out of prison even more times than the Anglin brothers combined. Once again, even as Frank was released a few months into his stay at his original school, FBI records show that he was locked up yet again at the Louisiana State Penitentiary from the end of 1945 to mid-July in 1948. A now 20-year-old Frank should have learned from his repeating history. Not all too surprising, a few months after this release, he found himself with cuffs slapped onto his wrists once more when he was caught breaking and entering. This time, he was sent to Florida State Penitentiary.

Among his extensive rap sheet included crimes ranging from narcotics possession to armed robbery. Later on, he would be charged on separate counts of unlawful flight and runaways on two separate occasions. It would appear as if Frank had an affinity for fleeing from custody and breaking out of state prisons, solidifying his own reputation for what guards dubbed as “shotgun freedom.” In Florida State Penitentiary alone, he managed to escape four different times.

Late into the night between the 24th and 25th of November in 1955, Frank would commit his final and most serious crime. Along with two

accomplices, Frank broke into the Bank of Slidell in Slidell, Louisiana. The three first broke in by drilling a hole through the wall on the first floor. After unsuccessfully searing a hole through the first bank vault with an acetylene torch, they tried their luck and emerged triumphant with the second. Despite the fact that the tear gas canisters built into both vaults were discharged, they decamped with \$6,165 USD (approximately \$64,650 today) worth of coins, lugging their 1,200 lb booty behind them. Ten months later, Frank and his accomplices were captured and taken into custody by officials from the Terrebonne Parish in Houma, Louisiana.

On September 19, 1956, Frank was sentenced to 14 years in prison. Keeping his track record of escapes in mind, authorities decided it was best to send Frank to Alcatraz. Four months later, Frank Lee Morris joined the rankings of the Alcatraz roster as inmate #AZ-1441. Frank Morris was the first to arrive in Alcatraz of the three escapees. The Anglin brothers would arrive soon after. On October 21, 1960, John joined the statistics as inmate AZ-1476. Clarence would be transferred three months later on the 10th of January the following year as inmate AZ-1485. Even with the multiple warnings from previous prisons advising against housing the brothers close to one another – given their shady escape histories – Warden Paul J. Madigan brushed this off as a failure of other prison security systems. The warden took it one step further, placing the brothers in cells right next to each other.

What most people don't often hear of is the critical fourth member to the artful escape plan. Meet Allen West, inmate AZ-1335. Out of over 1500 inmates who have seen the insides of the lone prison walls, Allen was one of 35 who had been there twice. Not unlike the escapees, he had also spent the whole of his life with prison as his second home, racking up at least 25 arrests over the span of his lifetime. He kept himself fed the only way he knew how – stealing cars and breaking into homes and businesses. He, too, had little education, topping off at an eighth grade level. Inside Alcatraz, other inmates saw him as scrappy, loud-mouthed, and belligerent. He was most known for his extremely unpredictable and explosive temper, often instigating fights with other inmates who dared strike a nerve of his. On top of that, the open racist often knocked skulls with the African American inmates.

Allen West, now on his second term in Alcatraz, was itching for a way out. The years in prison had been rough on him, having spent most of his time cooped up in solitary confinement. When he was ultimately released to the general population, he began listening to stories from veteran inmates about previous escape attempts. He heard about the failed attempts in the '30s, as well as the catastrophe that ensued in the Battle of Alcatraz in 1946 that saw a body count of five. Slowly, he began to take mental notes about where the flighty-footed men had gone wrong.

Frank had been working alongside another inmate in the prison library when Allen sidled towards them. Allen encouraged them to take a gander at the old air-ducts. It was apparently his observation that there was an unmanned and still-accessible blower unit at B-block. The barred unit was connected to a ceiling vent that could very well hold the key to their freedom. An intrigued Frank would invite the Anglin brothers in on the idea stewing in their minds, well-aware that their similar, unbreakable drive for freedom could be put to use.

Later interviews with Allen would show him taking full credit as the puppeteer of the breakout operation. Many believed Frank Morris more likely of the two to have been the mastermind, as Allen was clearly the more violent of the pair. Whether or not Allen was truly the inception of the planning continues to be up for debate. What we do know is that all four would play equal parts in contributing to perhaps one of the most admirably enterprising escapes in modern history.

The beginning of the covert planning had commenced by December of 1961. Allen had already been previously acquainted with John from doing time together at the Florida State Penitentiary, so a sense of familiarity bonded these men. With the warden already gifting the Anglin brothers with neighboring cells, the shy and soft-spoken Frank filed in a request for cell relocation of his own. The prison officials took Frank's squeaky-clean conduct record into account and granted his request almost immediately. Soon, Frank was transferred to Cell 138, next to Allen's at B-140. The fact that all four inmates were assigned to Cell Block B only made communication easier. The convenient proximity allowed the pairs to brainstorm and discuss ideas into the night. It was later found that they

would employ the use of the old-fashioned “telephone” tactic many are familiar with. Once water was drained from their toilets, their interconnected plumbing system allowed them to communicate with each other. This created the simple effect similar to two tin cans linked with strings. Outside of their cells, the newly-assigned four-seater tables at the cafeteria also gave the aspiring escapees plenty of time to elaborate on their plan.

The inmates discovered a narrow passageway behind their row of cells – a utility room for plumbing pipes and heating ducts that were rarely used. And in each cell was a small grill-covered air vent, surrounded by concrete walls. They realized that if they could somehow enlarge the hole of the vent, they could slither their way through to the back of the wall. Their slim, fit builds were just an added advantage.

With proper tools of any kind extremely limited, the men were forced to improvise. Before MacGyver even became a household name, these men were fashioning their own tools from whatever they could find. Allen contributed by collecting a few rusted and abandoned saw blades from the said utility room. They slipped metal spoons from their trays when guards had their backs to them, and proceeded to sneak them out of the cafeteria. The ladle end of the spoon was snapped off and the other end bandaged with duct tape for easy gripping. They took apart a vacuum cleaner and hot-wired the motor to make their own version of a homemade drill. Both tools were essential for chipping away at the cement around the vents and drilling larger holes.

Their long list of handmade gadgets didn't stop there. A wrench was fabricated from a plank of wood with a browned wrench-head screwed onto the top. A round housing unit was also thrown together to fit on top of their drill to silence the ruckus. Bolts spiked with sleeves and shafts were used as pressure to weaken and spread bars apart. A dim but working flashlight was charged with batteries they removed from two penlights. Tiny blades and sharpened pieces of metal tubing were also used as digging and gouging tools.

To sneak into utility closets around the prison, they made careful observations about the unique teeth of the jingling keys on the guards'

belts. They would then carve the mimicked patterns of the teeth markings onto a handle of a metal spoon, arming themselves with their very own set of keys. On an interesting side note, guards that began wising up to the inmates' lingering eyes started to cover their keys with metal sleeves. The inmates made sure to conceal the evidence thoroughly. After the tools were no longer needed, all were dumped into a five-gallon paint bucket hardened with cement, and hidden in their workshop. This method proved fruitful, as authorities were only able to locate the bucket much later.

The inmates worked tooth and nail to broaden that hole. Stooping over on your knees on hours on end was backbreaking work, but freedom was so darned close they could almost taste the salty air of the San Francisco Bay on the tips of their tongues. Come May of 1962, Frank and the Anglin brothers had successfully eradicated the cement behind their cell blocks and were right on schedule for the next part – the vent above Cell Block B. To drown out the commotion they were making in their cells, they chose to do most of their work during the one-hour music break permitted to the musician inmates of the prison. Frank himself would purchase a concertina. This is an old-fashioned free-reed instrument that resembles an accordion, with straps and small buttons on both ends of the piece. He played the rich, folksy tunes of his concertina in front of guards, disguising the real reason he'd accumulated one in the first place.

The pairs of inmates made sure to follow their schedule rigorously. When the clock struck 5:30 in the afternoon, they would carry off from where they left off the previous night, and would cease and desist by nine, shortly before the guards called lights-out. They took turns working, with one having at it while the other stood by on lookout duty. The lookout would sit close to the bars of their cell with a mirror in hand, jutting their arms out of the bars from time to time to check for passing guards.

Soon, the four started work on their dummy heads, one of the most fascinating aspects of the case. With materials accumulated within the walls of their cells, they pieced together the outer layer mask for their dummies and whittled them into shape. They achieved this by blending bars of soap, ground cement chunks, and concrete dust in the corners of their confinement. Another inmate by the name of Leon “Whitey”

Thompson, who appeared in the documentary *Escape: Breakout from Alcatraz*, claimed to have taught them how to mix flesh-toned paint. They took tufts of human hair and laced it together with thread, which resulted in a “ponytail” appearance. Overlapping swatches of hair onto one another created realistic volume for their dummy heads. Using glue nicked from the prison workshop, they even pasted real hair onto their “eyebrows” and cut fine pieces of thread for “eyelashes,” showing their meticulous attention to detail. Many would later speculate that the paintings of the Anglin brothers' girlfriends kept in their cells were simply a ruse to obtain materials.

To hide the gaping hole in the wall, the four made clever, nearly identical replicas of their air vents and the square of wall around it. Cardboard boxes were used for the decoy vents, with coats of paint glazed onto the sides of the hole to match the walls of their cells. Stolen cement was also used to fortify the increasingly flimsy walls around the hole. Wire hooks were fastened onto the backs of the replicas so that they could wedge it back into place when they decided to make their exit.

A pivotal factor of their ultimate victory was keeping their heads low. Clean conduct records awarded you the privilege of being selected for the job you applied for. Even Allen had kept his ticking time bomb of a temper in check during the months of their planning. Frank switched out of his job at the prison library and went to work at the shops, making brushes. There, he was able to pocket brushes without anyone noticing. John worked in the laundry room, where he snuck raincoats and spare clothes for the team. Clarence worked in the prison barber shop. Instead of sweeping away cut hair, he furtively pulled open the waistband of his slacks and dropped clumps of dark-colored manes inside before dawdling back to his cell. Allen was one of the crew members assigned to repaint the utility corridor. It was there that he allegedly blueprinted the layout of their escape route in his head, and where he was initially inspired with the idea of crawling through the air vents behind their cells.

Last, came the final means of their escape. In Allen's work area, he intentionally did a horrible job of cleaning up. He swept dirt and debris out the gaps of the cell bars, drizzling dust and mucking up the floors of the

cells below him. Because of this, he was able to persuade the guards into allowing him to drape blankets and tarp over the bars of the cells, completely obscuring their work area. After hours, this became the team's secret workshop. Following instructions from magazines found in the prison library, they used over 50 raincoats to make inflatable life vests and a 6x14 ft raft. The seams of the inflatable objects were vulcanized with the homemade application of heat and pressure, utilizing an exposed hot water pipe for heat, and a heavy plank for the latter. Frank's concertina was broken apart and used as the inflating mechanism for the life raft. Sturdy paddles were made from strips of wood they found lying around. For improved visibility on the roof, they prepared a standing periscope made from canvas boards and mirrors taped together.

What confounded many was not the patience or skill it took to make the break, but how the four managed to achieve such a great deal of work under the guards' nose. Some theorized that several guards were bribed to look the other way. In the same documentary, former inmates revealed that out of approximately 160 prisoners in Alcatraz at the time, at least half the population knew what was going on. Allen had to tread especially lightly around black inmates due to the racial tension between them, but in the end, it became clear that no one ratted them out. As Charlie Hopkins, a former inmate, put it, "That's what a good inmate does – he helps him out any way they can."

A total of six inmates were said to have been involved. The first was the only other confirmed accomplice, a man by the name of June Stephens, who occupied the cell directly above Frank's. June was said to have been invited into the scheming from the get-go, but because he occupied the upper tier, added with the complications of the water spout system barricading the hole of his vent, he was forced to drop out. Though another inmate Robert L. Williams would deny involvement, guards discovered holes around the air vent in his cell during the after-escape shakedown. Robert, a close friend of Frank's, was accused of helping the escapee cop materials.

And then there was Ellsworth "Bumpy" Johnson, popularly known to the inmates as the "Al Capone of Harlem." Frank approached Bumpy when

Allen alerted him that a few of the black inmates had spotted him fumbling with his vent. It appeared that Bumpy was key in keeping the African American community quiet about the team's plans. Authorities would later explore the possibility of Bumpy's involvement with their plans post-escape.

After eight months of excruciating planning and preparation, the day of the escape finally reared its head. A whistling breeze swept past the rippling, steely-blue waters of San Francisco Bay. The air was chilly and crisp, but the fog-free horizon hinted at the forthcoming calm of the night. To the unsuspecting guards and other inmates bustling around the premises, it was just another day marked off the calendars on their bedsides. As for Frank, he knew it was time. The previous night, he had prowled through the air vents armed with his trusty periscope to scan the roof for guards. The coast was gloriously clear. What was more, all that held the hatch of the vent were six teeny screws. Testing the waters, he found that he could unscrew the lax screws with just his fingers. It was now or never.

In the late afternoon of June 11, 1962, Frank slunk into Allen's cell. He informed him that the top of the vent was loose enough to break through and that he'd taken a peek at the clear skies and seemingly agreeable tides. But as Frank crept back out of his cell to alert the Anglin brothers, a jittery wave of panic flushed through Allen's system. There was a problem.

Allen hadn't quite caught up with the rest of the crew's progress with the hole in his wall. His first attempt to gouge through the wall had been much too hasty, a job that required patience over time. When cement began crumbling around the edges of his deteriorating wall, he had to patch it back up with fresh cement to avoid raising suspicion from the guards. To add onto this, for the past few months, he'd been hustling the production of the life raft, which kept him away from his cell. The spare time he did have in his cell wasn't allotted properly, and was spent perfecting his life vest instead. Be that as it was, the other three prepared to set their plan in motion.

At 9:30 PM sharp, pitch-black darkness blanketed the entirety of the prison. The four inmates swung their legs off the sides of their beds. With

the highs of adrenaline coursing through their bloodstreams, they geared themselves for their escape.

Each positioned their dummy heads sideways onto their pillows, fluffing and bulking up their blankets to mimic slumbering bodies. Frank, John, and Clarence pried their fake vent covers out of place and squeezed through the holes, fixing the vents back in place with the drawstrings weaved through the back of the cardboard. As the three stealthily crept through the passageway behind their cell walls, Allen was still struggling to excavate his vent hole. Allen reported that Frank would join him from the other side to help him for at least ten minutes. And when Allen found yet another steel bar literally barring his way to freedom, his heart sunk to the pit of his gut. What was worse, the three who had made it beyond the wall had not another second to spare. Bidding Allen good luck and a grave farewell, Frank returned to the Anglin brothers.



Frank Morris' dummy head



One of the holes dug into the cell wall



The service corridor

The three reached the end of the corridor, sizing up the copper tubing staunchly propped up against the wall towards the vent ceiling. Using protruding tubes as footrests, the three scaled the pipes, illuminating their path with their handmade flashlights. They quietly dropped into their concealed workshop and proceeded to tighten the seams and sew up any potential and existing holes in their raft. When they finished the raft, they seized all their tools and headed back into the vent.

They unscrewed the top of the vent, cautiously lifting off the lid and placing it gently aside. As soon as the invigorating wind and fresh open air licked their skin, all three were struck with excitement and relief. One by one, they hefted themselves over the opening and onto the rooftop.

The inmates hunched their shoulders and raced to the other end of the 300 ft roof and slid down the pipes on the side of the building. They landed on the gravelly terrain and made a beeline for the chain-link fences. Snipping through the thick barbed wire, they wriggled out of the hole and onto the other side of the fence. Freedom was close at hand. With crouched postures to avoid detection from the guard towers, they sped past the water tower and tumbled down the hill to the shore. The last piece of concrete evidence of what really transpired that night ended with the imprint of their raft on the sand. Boarding the inflated raft, the three pushed themselves off the shore and paddled into the night, never to be seen again.

Word had spread like wildfire among the inmates about the night of their escape, so a handful of inmates were listening for it, wide awake. Many were secretly rooting for them. Inmates Whitey Thompson and Charlie Hopkins recalled the events of the night vividly. Whitey remembered the shuffling noise heard throughout the cell block as they crawled through the passageway behind their cells. Decades later, he opened up about his suspicions on the guards' involvement in their escape. It was his understanding that with all the years and time droning by behind prison walls, prisoners and guards alike were subconsciously trained to know every single sound in the place. He recalled one of the escapees dropping a metal bar by accident, the heavy tool clanging noisily against the pipes in its descent. A few inmates jumped out to flush their toilets in hopes of muffling the sounds, but he noted how the guards hadn't batted an eyelid. Furthermore, when the trio made their way across the roof, anxious inmates could hear the sudden cacophony of squawking and flapping wings from the scattering seagulls gathered on the rooftop. Again, the guards showed not an inkling of interest.

At last, Allen was able to break through the bar holding him in. He squeezed through the hole in his wall and scurried through the planned

route as quick as he could. But when he reached the shore and stared out into the vast, dreadfully empty horizon, he knew he was too late. He sat down on the edge of the shore and waited, but when the pinks of dawn traced through the slowly brightening skies, he finally gave up. His head hung low, he snuck back into his cell. Tossing his dummy head aside, he climbed under his blankets and squeezed his eyes shut, stewing in silent regret.

At seven in the morning, the blaring wake-up bell pierced through the thick silence, rousing slumbering inmates from their sleep. All the inmates filed out of their cells and used their ten free minutes to wash up in the bathroom, while smokers puffed on their first cigarettes of the day. At the sound of the lieutenant's whistle, they rounded up by the doors of their cells for the daily morning countdown. As the guards strolled towards Frank's cell, they paused.

Eyebrows cocked, the guards folded their arms and barked at the sleeping figure to get out of bed. Another guard reached the Anglin brothers' cells, faced with the same dilemma. The crabby guard by Morris' cell bent forward to his sleeping head, shrieking like a fog horn in his ear. But when the guard squeezed his arm through the bars of his cell, nudging at his head, the guards and those watching around him jerked back like they'd been shocked. The dummy head fell over the edge of Frank's bed and clunked face-first to the ground. In one of the photographs released by the FBI of a close-up shot of Frank's head, the broken nose from the fall is clearly visible.

With that, all the guards scrambled to their feet, wielding their whistles. The remaining inmates watched as confusion and panic engulfed the guards, ordering them back into their cells. As amused and expectant inmates perched on the foot of their bed to observe the bedlam unfold, guards sprinted towards the warden to alert him at once.

Jolene Babyak, daughter of the associate warden, Arthur M. Dollison, was 15 at the time. Her father was acting warden while Warden Olin G. Blackwell was away on vacation. In an interview conducted with her courtesy of the History Channel, she speaks out on the day her father received the phone call. Arthur shared with Jolene years later that the

moment he'd heard the phone ringing, a strange feeling started arising in his gut. He reached for the phone with what he described as dread. Though he had no way of knowing what the phone call was going to be about, he knew it was not going to be pleasant.

And just as Arthur pressed his ear to the phone, his dread was merited. The first words that the nervous guard sputtered into the crackling line would stay with him for years to come – “We've got three dummies in the cellhouse!” Arthur slammed the phone back into the receiver and bolted out of the house. Within moments, a howling siren resounded throughout the whole island.

The investigation began at once as Arthur arrived at the scene. Each inmate could do nothing but hover over the guards as they ransacked each of their cells for clues. Allen's hole was almost immediately found. Guards hooked him under the arms and dragged him off for questioning.

Faced with the damning evidence of his man-sized hole in the wall, the brooding Allen knew he had to fess up. Reports of his interviews revealed Allen to be calm and cooperative throughout the length of the interview, but provided them only with details that they would be able to find. Nothing of substance was offered to the authorities to jeopardize the chances of the victorious escapees. Clarence Carnes, another inmate, told of how Allen was hauled off to D-block – solitary confinement. Though most inmates never saw him again, Carnes retained that Allen would become a folk hero among the other inmates.

A little under a hundred guards were released across the island for clues Frank and the Anglin brothers may have left behind. Boats were dispatched around the island. Guards equipped with binoculars were tasked with the hunt for floating bodies. Authorities combed through the dozens of caves and crevices along the shoreline that were large enough to house grown men, but the search turned up futile.

Meanwhile, the remaining inmates were still caged in their cells, on the queue for interrogation. Inmates refused to give up any information on the matter, with most claiming they knew nothing was going on. With what little information they could find, Alcatraz authorities alerted the FBI. The

escapees were all charged at once, with bond recommended at \$50,000 USD (around \$392,300 today) each upon their capture. What ensued was allegedly one of the largest-scale manhunts in all of North American history.

An air, land, and sea search was put into action. The coast guard and all the local police enforcement joined forces to locate the escapees. When federal agents were finally brought to the Alcatraz crime scene, they were bewildered. The first red flag was spotted almost immediately – the blankets that Allen had been able to convince the guards into allowing him to hang over their undercover workshop. Their minds were even more boggled when they tore down the blankets. The array of tools left behind was compared to an aisle at a hardware store. Apart from the unbelievable collection of tools they'd built over the past eight months, an extra paddle, life vest, and a small raft was found. The three escapees had left behind what they could in their workshop for Allen, just in case he ever made it out of there.

When word got out to the public, the whole nation was abuzz with fervent excitement and anticipation. The press had a field day with the story, expanding and profiting on the escape any way they could. Soon, even the rest of the world had caught up on the scandal, seeing a story or notice about the escapees plastered on the front pages on a regular basis. “Wanted” posters were slapped onto every surface of the city, offering \$50USD (\$392) reward for any information on them. Citizens became well-acquainted with the unsmiling, semi-scowling faces of the soon-to-be legendary trio. Hundreds of directionless leads flooded the hot-lines.

Though authorities did not find any bodies, they would stumble upon two clues in later weeks. First was one of the paddles the escapees had used, floating between Alcatraz and Angel Island. This gave authorities reason to believe that the escapees had targeted Angel Island. Next was a waterproof sack discovered in about three feet of water. It was filled with photos of Clarence's family and loved ones, as well as nine sheets of paper scribbled with various contact numbers. From there, authorities concluded that all three men had drowned.

Just two years after the escape, the Anglin family was struck with yet another blow. According to police reports, Alfred, who had been housed in Kilby Prison in Alabama at the time, had tried to escape. Only, he didn't make it. He had climbed over the fence but tripped head-on onto chords of live wire, electrocuting himself.

A few months after the daring escape, Robert Kennedy, Attorney General at the time, called for Alcatraz to shut its doors. Reasons cited pertained to the inability to keep up with the funding of the costly establishment, but many suspected that authorities were shamed into retirement of the facility. After all, the “inescapable” prison they bragged about apparently wasn't so. The remaining inmates of the prison were shipped out to separate institutions to serve out the rest of their sentences. As for the escapees, they were never seen again.

Regardless of the hundreds of calls that poured in at the time and the leads that continued to trickle in over the years, many firmly believe that the men had perished in the waters. Among them were some of the former inmates of Alcatraz, who admitted with downcast eyes that the escapees couldn't have survived. This has resulted in a heated debate that would carry on to this day, with many smelling a foul government conspiracy at play.

Allen had relayed to the prison officials that the four had planned to escape to Angel Island, where they would then sneak off to the mainland. Once they got to the mainland, they would find the nearest civilians and obtain guns, clothing, cars, and other essentials so they could make it off on foot. FBI reports stated that no reports of robberies or stolen vehicles were called in during the night of the escape, adding to their reasoning. However, a *MythBusters* program from 2011 testing the possibility of the escapees surviving on their raft unveiled that producers of the show had in fact found a report of a stolen vehicle on the night of the June 1962 escape.

Authorities were quick to dismiss naysayers who theorized that the men must have survived because no confirmed bodies of any of the escapees were ever found. Researchers pitched in on the matter, asserting that it was in fact, a common occurrence for bodies to completely vanish in the San Francisco Bay waters. They recalled a tragic case just four months after

the escape. A heartbroken 33-year-old man named Seymour Webb abandoned his car in the middle of the busy Golden Gate Bridge. Among a sea of witnesses, he flung himself off the railing, only to land on another landing ten feet below. To everyone's horror, the briefly immobilized man bounced back to his feet and lunged over the edge. Despite the dozens of witnesses who saw where Seymour had fallen and the authorities' prompt arrival, his body was never recovered.

Others doubted the men survived the harsh waters of the San Francisco Bay. The temperature of the bay averaged at around 10-12 C. Scientists estimated that bodily functions would either shut down, or at the very least, be adversely affected within 20 minutes. Heating systems for the showers were installed at Alcatraz to condition inmates against the water temperatures if they did try to escape.

Another factor often drilled into the argument were Clarence's belongings found near the shoreline. Authorities believed that the Anglin brother would never have willingly departed with his prized possessions, alluding that this was proof that at least Clarence hadn't survived. Anglin family members, on the other hand, were adamant that this meant nothing. They believed that the brothers had discarded the waterproof sack with the purpose of throwing the authorities off their scent. Perhaps a more telling item that the authorities had recovered was the abandoned life vest. Teeth marks were found around the valve, with officials concluding that the clip used to seal the valve had failed, making it extremely difficult for the owner to stay afloat.

One of the most important leads to the case would come about four months after the escape. A Norwegian freighter reported that on July 17, 1962, they had seen a body floating 20 miles from the Golden Gate Bridge along the path to Canada. The body was floating face-down, with its rigid hands and feet dipping into the water, but the man's bare buttocks was in full view, bleached and ruddied from sun exposure. More importantly, the man was dressed in denim slacks, which was the standard prison-issued uniform. To back this up, coroners from all over the state arrived at the same conclusion – it was possible for a body to float five weeks after

drowning. FBI officials stated that around the time, no other breakouts from other prisons in the near vicinity had been reported.

An entire website was constructed to detail the reasons why the unnamed author was skeptical about the three's survival. First, it was pointed out that the inmates had departed from the west of the island. Tides were highest and most unpredictable in this region, where undertows were a regular occurrence. Though there were professional swimmers who have successfully completed the swim from Alcatraz to shore, they all started off from the east of the island. Another inmate's fate from the escape of 1943 was summoned. John Boarman would try to flee the island with three other men. Even with all the months of training John had under his belt playing handball with other inmates to strengthen his biceps, he was pulled down under the surface right in front of dazed guards and inmates. The one inmate that did make it to shore, John Paul Scott, was so overwrought with fatigue, dehydration, and hypothermia that he was almost instantly found by authorities on the mainland bank.

The shark theory was brought to light. It was a popular myth that vicious, man-eating sharks infested the waters around Alcatraz. One story often passed around implicated that guards had trained an angry one-finned shark to circle the island, ready to devour any poor sap that wandered into its path. This theory was quickly refuted, as scientists assured the public that only leopard sharks inhabited the bay. Although these sharks weren't man-eaters by nature, they were scavengers. Many believed that sharks and other sea creatures could very well have feasted on the dead bodies. Many insisted this was why only one body was ever found.

The prison's severe set of rules and regulations also made it unlikely for the men to have escaped. In Alcatraz, only visits from immediate family members were allowed. All conversations in these visits were closely monitored by guards stationed next to their tables. It wasn't possible to pass gifts or notes of any kind to the inmates. The holes in the thick glass that allowed for conversation were so tiny, even rolled-up, flimsy receipts couldn't squeeze through them. All mail was intercepted by officials and even retyped to avoid common parlor tricks like inscribing messages in

invisible ink. All these factors made it highly unlikely for any of the escapees to have planned help from outside the prison walls.

The dwindling credibility of leads received by officials over the years has disheartened many, with more and more likening the sightings of the escapees to those of Elvis and Tupac Shakur. The other two escapees from the Alcatraz escape in 1937, Ted Cole and Ralph Roe, were the first of the now five presumed drowned by the FBI. In Alvin Karpis' memoir, he penned that he had been Cole and Roe's lookout during the escape, and how their bodies were yanked beneath the surface by billowing waves within two minutes upon their entering. Even so, numerous sightings of Cole and Roe continued to sprout for years to come.

One of the more intriguing tip-offs reported to authorities came just a week after the escape. An unidentified caller claimed that a group of men happened upon the escapees, loading Frank and the Anglin brothers into their camper shell pickup truck. The truck was apparently rigged, only able to operate from the outside. The escapees were then unloaded from the back of the truck and forced to stand before shallow graves. They were shot in the back of the head with a .38 caliber pistol execution-style before they were buried in their graves. Once again, nothing has ever come of this lead.

Chapter 7: The End of an Era

Even before Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary opened its doors, jaded officials had already been questioning its validity. Many predicted that the island institution would not stand the test of time. Despite the speculations of power-tripping authorities and inmate maltreatment that had trickled out to the media over the years, raised eyebrows turned to collar-clutching when authorities became savvy to the draining dollars.

Authorities were aware that the island penitentiary would not come cheap, but when they tallied up the numbers of the operating costs, they were gobsmacked. It was by far the most expensively run prison in the country. The first thing to take into account is the island itself. All the restocking, including food, drinkable water, and other necessities, required a boat trip. The 20 boat runs for the civilians and the power generator that ran the whole island only added to the incessantly stacking bills.

Towards the 1950s, stringent policies in Alcatraz had laxed, with prison programs expanding, and more privileges permitted to the prisoners. Not only were the prisoners now able to converse freely in “low tones,” they were now able to express themselves with music, too. Inmates were allowed to form bands of their own, and were allowed to play their instruments in their cells for up to an hour after dinner. More outlets of creativity could be found with oil painting, as well as the elaborate gardens brightening up the island. The time seemed slightly easier to bear with their rich selection of books, the brand-new radio system, and their bi-monthly movie nights. Though inmates welcomed these changes with open arms, outside authorities were less than tickled at the reality of the rising numbers.

In 1952, Bureau of Prisons Director, James Bennett, censured the impracticality of the maximum-security facility's location. Tucked away in the West Coast on a minute island, hauling over inmates and officials from the opposite ends of the country was a costly hassle. In Bennett's annual report, he found it in the country's best interest that “Alcatraz be shut down and replaced by an institution more centrally located and less difficult to operate.”

7 years later, an annual report would make a similar suggestion. According to the 1959 report, the accommodation of Alcatraz inmates cost \$10 a day,

more than triple than the \$3 national average. One congressman even went so far as to claim that putting the inmates up in fancy Waldorf Astoria suites, complete with room service, would cost taxpayers less than it did to house them at the island.

It did not help that the year before that, the aging and poorly-kept structure was found to be in extremely poor state. Over the years, the harshness of the gusting wind and licking saltwater had rusted and corroded the metal within the reinforced concrete walls and piping system. Experts estimated another half a decade's worth of life in the island structure. And so, they begun work on major repairs.

Just 3 years later, however, a 1961 requisite engineering survey reported that the building was irreparable, and rendered a lost cause. Before long, yet another dilemma was brought to their attention. The sewage disposal system in Alcatraz consisted of one single pipe, dumping unfiltered sewage straight into the waters of the San Francisco Bay. The only solution was to create a sewage treatment plant on the island, which was more money authorities were dubious to cough up. All in all, it would take another whopping \$5 million to clinch the deal. In the same year, Attorney General Robert Kennedy proposed plans for a new maximum-security facility at Marion, Illinois.

Gradually, the prison was was downsized. The inevitable occurred on March 21, 1963. For the first time ever, Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary opened its doors to the public. Journalists, photographers, and other members of media from all over the nation teemed into the island, memorializing the event. Witnesses remembered it to be a deeply poignant event. While the media watched quietly from the sidelines, the last 27 inmates were ushered out of the island in single-file, with large coats draped over their shoulders and their wrists cuffed in front of them. In true military fashion, Warden Olin G. Blackwell and the Alcatraz guards marched out of their guard towers one at a time.

Conjectures about the true motives behind the island penitentiary's closing followed. The highly publicized escape of Morris and the Anglins had taken place just less than a year before Alcatraz shut its doors. Many – especially those that were certain the trio's escape had been successful – believed it was the embarrassment on behalf of the government authorities, their

“inescapable” pet project a seeming failure. Others believed Attorney General Kennedy had singlehandedly pulled the strings for its closing, as he constantly expressed his disdain with Alcatraz in public. Authorities dismissed the merit of these theories, asserting that the decision to wind down the prison had been made years ago.

Frank Weatherman, the last-ever inmate of Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary, had this to say upon his departure, “It's mighty good to get up and leave. This Rock ain't good for nobody.”

The official closing of Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary was met with mixed reviews, but to some, it inspired possibility. A San Francisco based organization, *Indians of All Tribes*, brought up the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie. This treaty between the United States and the Lakota, assured that abandoned, retired, and unused federal land would be returned to the Native American tribes they were stolen from. In 1964, when Alcatraz Island came up for grabs as formally declared “surplus federal property,” the IOAT jumped on the opportunity.

On March 8, 1964, a group of Sioux Indians paddled towards the island, becoming the first batch of the Occupation Alcatraz movement. Among the group of roughly 40 people were reporters, photographers, and Elliot Leighton, the group's legal representation. The 4-hour campaign was the first stand, an extension from what Adam Fortunate Eagle called an “already prevalent” awareness raised from Bay Area street theater. Allen Coutier, one of the Sioux activists, acted as spokesman for the event. He relayed their proposal to the press, which entailed purchasing the island back from the government at the same price they had paid their ancestors. At 47 cents an acre, this amounted to \$5.64 for the usable plots of land, or a total of \$9.40 for the whole island. But the protesters were not unreasonable – they assured the government that they would be able to use the Coast Guard lighthouse as they pleased.

5 years later, a fire in October 1969 consumed San Francisco's American Indian center. The IOAT set their sights on Alcatraz Island once more, and tried their luck again. Headed by Adam Fortunate Eagle, rising star Mohawk Richard Oakes, and university student leader Shoshone Bannock LaNada, knew they had to go bigger. It needed to be bold, something that really captured the public's attention. A plan was devised. On the 9th of November,

Fortunate Eagle, along with his recruits, flagged down the captain of the *Monte Cristo*, a grand 3-masted yacht. They claimed that their boats had not arrived, and they were needed somewhere urgently that was only accessible by boat. After much deliberation, they convinced the captain to swing by Alcatraz Island.

Just as the *Monte Cristo* steered closer towards the island, 5 of Fortunate Eagle's recruits jumped ship. Jim Vaughn, Joe Bill, Ross Harden, Jerry Hatch, and Oakes – all Indians of different tribes – swam to the Alcatraz shore, claiming the island by “right of discovery.” It did not take long for the Coast Guard to boot the men off the island. The group persisted, returning later at night with 14 members to stay overnight. The next day, Fortunate Eagle drafted a public proclamation to the General Services Association, alerting them that they had taken back the land on legal grounds. When the proclamation was delivered, they left the land peacefully.

The IOAT held several more meetings following the short November 9th occupation. Oakes took control of the project, rallying up even more of his fellow American Indian students at university. Their spirited discussions concluded that a proper, prolonged occupation could be easily executed. Oakes took a trip down to the UCLA American Indian Studies Center, where he gained 80 Indian students, making up the vast majority of the approximately 100 people the group eventually accumulated. Young urban students were magnetized to Oakes' oozing appeal. Oakes seemed to be a natural born leader. He was good-looking, charismatic, personable, and an eloquent speaker.

On November 20, 89 American Indians set sail for Alcatraz Island. Among these settlers were university students, dozens of married couples, and 6 children. When the Coast Guard spotted their boats, they immediately set up a barricade. Most of the group were hindered by the blockades, but 14 protesters managed to sidle past the guards, and victoriously made it onto the island.

The peaceful protesters shrugged off the warnings from authorities and proceeded to set up camp on Alcatraz Island, a land they believed belonged to all the Native American tribes. Some took shelter in the old warden's house, whereas others camped out in the guards' lodges. Soon, the protesters began adding personal touches of home to liven up their new community.

Graffiti adorned the walls, with slogans such as “Red Power” and “Custer Had It Coming” emblazoned in bright spray paint. On the guard tower, a large message could be read from afar: “Peace and Freedom. Welcome. Home of the Free Indian Land.”

The 14 protesters then set to work on another official proclamation addressed to the “The Great White Father and All His People.” They listed their intentions of transforming the island to construct an Indian school, a museum, and a spiritual center. This time, they updated their buying offer to a quote of “\$24 in glass beads and a red cloth,” which was allegedly how much it had cost to buy the whole of Manhattan. The protesters stated that the island's lack of running water, electricity, phone lines, and vegetation could not deter them, as they had already suffered the same fates on Indian reservations.

Another motive that is believed to have prompted the occupation was the government's poorly-received treatment of Native Americans. In 1953, the government decided to shut down several Indian reservations, forcibly relocating families to urban areas. Professor Troy Johnson, the chairman of an American Indian Studies program, summed it up, “They wanted to focus attention on broken treaties, broken promises, and termination of tribal areas.”

Slowly but surely, more and more American Indians of different tribes made it onto the island. When the settlers made themselves at home, an organized community was quickly assembled. A council was elected, with Oakes as Chief. There was a job for everyone in the community – sanitation, housekeeping, cooking, and laundry. A communal kitchen and clinic were posted for everyone to use. For security, the “Bureau of Caucasian Affairs,” a play on the existing Bureau of Indian Affairs, was put in place. The security team stationed themselves on the shorelines, keeping a vigilant eye for intruders. Daycare and schooling were even established for the children of the community.

Supporters of the occupation regularly shipped in reinforcements from the land, including potluck feasts, tools, clothes, and other resources from the mainland. At one point, the community was at its most thriving with 400 inhabitants. Many of the settlers, particularly the younger folk, had fond memories of the happy, peace-loving community. Asha Nordwall, Fortunate

Eagle's daughter, recalled, "We were just kind of happy to be a part of all these Indians coming from everywhere."

President Richard Nixon and his administration opted to take their time with handling the situation. For the meantime, as long as the protesters remained peaceful, they would be left alone. The administration sent government officials to negotiate with the IOAT leaders, but little came of their exchange. The IOAT were unwavering in their quest for the deed of Alcatraz, but officials held their own ground, stating that this was an impossible feat.

The longer the occupation lasted, the tug-of-war of power dragged on. It was not long before the community within the island began to crumble. When most of the original occupants and organizers returned to university, the IOAT leaders found the new inhabitants a notch less than ideal. As Oakes himself put it, "Our biggest problems are freelance photographers and the hippies. They stay and eat up our stores, then leave. Then we have to clean up after them." Many of the new inhabitants were rebuked for free-loading, and it was found that most of them knew little to nothing about the important movement. Drugs and alcohol, which were declared contraband in the beginning of the occupation, were being snuck into the population, and it was soon spiraling out of control.

At the same time, Oakes was fending off 2 different tribes for leadership of the island. The struggle took an ugly turn when tragedy struck in January of 1970. While Oakes' young stepdaughter was playing by the abandoned prison stairwells, she tumbled through the railing, and fell to her death. Oakes and his wife left the island, leaving the 2 other groups to fight it out between them.

When May of 1970 came, patience from the Nixon administration was wearing thin. In an effort to cast out the occupants, they shut off whatever power was left on the island, and dislodged the only water barge that was carrying fresh water into Alcatraz. 3 days following the removal of the barge, a mysterious fire ravaged through the island. The fire was contained, but several historical buildings were casualty to the blaze. The government faulted the protesters. Conversely, the protesters were convinced that undercover arsonists employed by the government were to blame, determined to derail their movement.

With Oakes' absence, it appeared that the problems in the Alcatraz community multiplied. Alcatraz caretakers reported back to the government, complaining about the increasingly squalid state of the island. The rampant usage of drugs and squabbles about authority were adding to the mischief, destroying the fabric of their primarily egalitarian society. With no clear leader, there was no one in the community the administration felt suitable negotiating with.

Later, authorities found another problem that needed to be addressed. Occupants were supposedly stripping copper wiring and tubing from the unused buildings, selling it off as scrap metal for food. On one occasion, 3 of these occupants were arrested and tried for selling 600 lbs worth of copper. As the year progressed, support began to dwindle from the outside world, with many past advocates burning their bridges with the remaining occupants. In the media, the inspirational headlines previously published about the movement transformed to those of alleged assaults and beatings.

The government decided enough was enough when two oil tankers collided at the entrance of the San Francisco Bay. Regardless of the fact that the absence of fog horns or adequate lighting from Alcatraz Island was exonerated from the cause of the collision, President Nixon called for a removal plan. The authorities planned to infiltrate the island when the occupancy was at its lowest number. This ensured that as little force as possible would be needed to escort them off the island.

On June 10, 1971, the government did just that. An armed mob of FBI agents, federal marshals, and other members of special forces swooped in on the land. A total of 6 men, 5 women, and 4 children were shipped back to the San Francisco shore. And with that, the 19-month Occupation of Alcatraz came to an end.

Ultimately, the IOAT were not successful in retaining their deed, but the event would go down in history as the longest prolonged occupation of a federal facility by Native Americans. In fact, this event was believed to have turned the key to a string of doors for the American Indian community. After the event, the controversial 1953 termination of Indian reservations was lifted. In addition, President Nixon rightly returned Blue Lake and over 48,000 acres of land to the Taos Indians.

As for Richard Oakes, his departure from Alcatraz and the tragic death of his stepdaughter were not enough to keep him from fighting for the rights of his people. He was able to help reinstate the 3,000,000 acres of land Pacific Gas & Electric had taken from the Pit River Indians. Sadly, during a confrontation with Michael Morgan, a YMCA camp manager, Oakes was shot, and killed.



Graffiti on a sign left by protesters



Dylan Oliphant's picture of the ruined warden's house

On October of 1973, the National Park Service reopened Alcatraz Island to the public, a newly renovated park attraction. The landmark's rich history piqued the interests of the public, with 50,000 visitors in just its first year of opening. Experts estimated that this figure alone was more than the number of people who had set foot on the island prior to that point. Today, Alcatraz Island remains one of the top attractions in San Francisco, garnering over 1.3 million visitors annually.

The legacy the island has left is one that continues to bleed into conversation today. Countless media publications including documentaries, articles, books, and big budget Hollywood blockbusters circulating the island have made their rounds. Incidentally, the island is also believed to be one of the most haunted locations in the world. Starting with its first Native American inhabitants who lamented the presence of evil spirits on the island, paranormal experts continue to be drawn to the island to this very day.

Many are left to wonder what life was truly like on the infamous island. Like Rufe Persful and aspiring escapees, there were those that were driven to

the end of their wits, and would stop at nothing to get off the island. Then there were Charles Berta, and other surviving inmates and guards who have nothing but pleasant words to say about the controversial penitentiary. In the end, it is all a matter of perspective. Those that genuinely knew what took place on the island were those that lived it.



Daniel Ramirez's photo of Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge



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